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Complete Novel By

ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

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The War Lord of Darkness

JUST opposite Canton and below Shameen the river boils into swift rapids up which the junks must stubbornly fight their way, unless their owners are affluent enough to pay the modest stipend charged by the noisy, puffing tug boats which string half a dozen junks together and pull them up to quieter waters.

Below the rapids lies a stretch of river given over to a queer confusion of traffic. There are huge unwieldy junks propelled by men plying long sweeps, assisted by polers who strain and grunt on the ends of bamboo poles. There are nervous, darting little sampans that seem barely to skim along the surface of the water. Narrow-beamed Chinese steamships, with smoke stacks that have a diameter equal to a third of the beam and a height equal to the length of the boat, bustle importantly back and forth, whistles screaming at every possible opportunity.

The hour was five-thirty P. M. It was summer. The day was insufferably hot. The western sun glinted from the river in dazzling reflection.

Along the banks of the river, many types of boats were moored. Here were the flower boats, with artistic ornamentations, where young women glanced beady-eyed invitation at the casual traveler. Here were the big amusement boats given over to banquets and parties, the square bows designed to hold

By ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

A Complete Novel of Chinese Mystery and Adventure

banquet tables, the interiors lined with opium smoking couches, the high sterns given over to cooking quarters.

A grayish object appeared in the rapids, bobbing serenely along.

The experienced eyes of the river boatman recognized it for what it was—a dead man.

Corpses awash are no unusual sight on this stretch of river. Farther upstream is a bandit-infested country, and human life yet remains the cheapest thing in China.

The body bobbed gaily down the rapids, whirled around at the bottom, then, swung by a side current, it drifted in close to the river boats which were moored at the edge of the stream.

The owner of a sampan, more venturesome than his brothers, pushed out to meet the bloated object.

Torn between fear and cupidity, he piloted his boat close to the thing which had once been a man. In a country given over to ancestor worship, there is much etiquette and some risk connected with such a maneuver. The ghost of such a man is a "homeless ghost" which is forced to wander about the world in a series of straight lines, looking for someone upon whom it may fasten itself. To become unduly attentive may result in a horrid bond with the homeless ghost.

On the other hand, it frequently happens that there is a small sum of money in the clothes of the deceased. In a country where one's stomach feels the pinch of perpetual hunger, one is willing

to take chances, even with ghosts.

But the owner of the sampan took one look and veered away. It was sufficient to show him the manner in which the man had met his death. One who has had his throat cut by the very efficient bandits of the upper river can hold out no hope of reward to a Cantonese boatman.

So the dead man bobbed along the river, dancing inertly along the sun-gilded ripples, all of the river traffic giving him clear road.

A family was holding a birthday celebration upon one of the big amusement boats. About three circular tables the diners kept up a steady din of hilarious conversation.

The bloated, inanimate thing swung sharply to one side, bore down upon the pleasure boat. One of the guests saw it and made a shrill comment.

Conversation ceased, and fifty pair of sharp eyes stared at the thing which threatened to bring ill omen upon the celebration.

Almost, the thing scraped the boat. Then, as though heeding the shrill cries of those who were imploring it to move away, it swept on past and moved again toward the center of the river.

But, as it slid along the surface of the dirty water, the sharp eyes of those on the boat caught the glitter of metal upon the right wrist. Someone cried out, and the keen ears of the owner of a sampan heard the cry.

In a country where the competition for livelihood is so keen, little things cannot be overlooked. The sampan darted. The boatman pushed down a long-handled net, swung the dead man in close to the boat, inspected the right arm for a moment, and then, with a swift flash of a knife, cut something loose from the swollen flesh.

The body, stripped of that which had glittered, was pushed once more into the current.

The venturesome boatman held in his hand an oval bit of metal upon one side of which was embossed the tower of a large building. Upon the other side appeared some printing and a number.

The boatman eyed it with avaricious appraisal. Of a certainty, this thing must be of value. It was not Chinese. It was in the language of the *Bak Gwiee Loe*. Therefore, the man must have secured it from some foreign devil. He would not have tied it around his wrist in this manner unless it had been of great value.

Since the thing was, obviously, the property of a white devil, the place where it would bring the largest price was in a sale to a white devil. The boatman made mental catalogue of such few white men as he knew and then, having fixed upon a plan of procedure, swung his sampan about and leaned lustily on the sculling oar.

All of which explained how it happened that Sam Mathews, of the Standard Oil Company in Canton, stared with speculative regard at an oval of metal, upon one side of which was shown the tower of the Traveler's Insurance Company and on the other were words indicating that the owner of that tag was insured in the Traveler's Insurance Company of Hartford, Connecticut, U. S. A., with the number of the insured's policy.

The bit of oval retained the stench of decay. Quite obviously, this unfortunate Chinese whose throat had been so neatly split from ear to ear was not the owner of an insurance policy in the Traveler's Insurance Company of Hartford Connecticut.

That night a messenger bore a sealed letter to the headquarters of the Standard Oil Company in Hongkong. Within twenty-four hours, cables had buzzed across the ocean, and the insurance company announced that the policy in question had been issued to one Charles Belter. That was the first authentic information which his friends in Hongkong had of the fate which had befallen Belter.

Some three weeks before, Belter had left upon an important mission to Canton. His mission required the payment of a relatively large sum of cash to certain persons who were in a position of political power. Belter had disappeared. The Cantonese politicians insisted that they had seen neither Belter nor his money. At the time, this had been taken as merely another bit of oriental wile, but now it appeared that Belter had pushed on up river, and that there something happened to him. Obviously, the floating body had been in the water for some days. In all probability, it must have come from the bandit-infested country upstream. It was reasonable to suppose that the unfortunate Chinese had met Charles Belter somewhere up river.

Where? What had happened? Where was Belter now?

The judgment of the little group in Hongkong was unanimous.

"Send for Jimmy Harder," they said.

That night the cables buzzed with messages to Jimmy Harder at Shanghai.

WITH the cablegram which he had just received on the table in front of him, Jimmy Harder consulted a schedule of the shipping which was due out of the Port of Shanghai. That which he found was hardly encouraging. Two days later, one of the big Japanese boats would be sailing for the south. Three days later he could catch one of the crack Empress boats. Within two hours there sailed a Chinese coaster, the *Patoma*.

Harder summoned Mow Jie, a man who posed as a Chinese servant, but who was, in reality, more than a servant, a man who had shared many adventures, many dangers.

"We sail," said Harder in Cantonese, "in two hours upon the *Patoma*. Do you, Mow Jie, arrange to be a deck passenger upon that boat and to take with you your two long ears."

"For what sounds," asked Mow Jie, "shall I listen with these long ears?"

"To the voices of men," Harder answered, "for therein lies wisdom."

Mow Jie had originally had some more formal name, but in his infancy he had been seized with dangerous illness, and his parents, realizing that the evil gods were jealous of the man-child who had come to bless the parents and were intent upon taking him away, had resorted to that last Chinese expedient by which desperate parents seek to balk the malignant devils who would snatch young men-babies from their cribs.

These parents had placed the sick infant upon his side, had pierced one ear for an ear-ring, so that the evil ones might think it was a girl-child, and they had called the infant only by the name of Mow Jie, which meant "Little Cat," so that the evil ones listening to the family conversations would never know that there was a man-child about, but would think that it was only an animal to whom the parents talked.

And by some strange whim of subconscious suggestion, Mow Jie had grown into a human cat. He had eyes that could see in the dark, ears that were abnormally acute, a sense of smell that was more than human, and he moved through the night upon feet of velvet.

"In two hours?" he asked.

"In two hours," said Harder.

And Mow Jie left, to run upon his strangely silent feet with no further comment.

It has long been an axiom of tropical China that the white man who comes there has his choice between one of two alternatives. He can either slow down, or he can die. Jimmy Harder did neither.

A wiry man, slender and quick-moving, he was filled with dynamic energy. Despite the humidity of tropical China, he did not excessively perspire, and therein lay the secret of his endurance.

There were various rumors about Jimmy Harder. Most of them were in

direct conflict. This much was known: he was retained by some half dozen of the big firms who had large property investments in China. These firms naturally desired to pursue the even tenor of their profit-making ways. Such things as revolutions, banditry and kidnappings were bitterly distasteful to these corporations, and because China was China, and because even the most drastic steps taken by a vengeful government, seeking to secure redress for wrongs done to its nationals, are of no avail when it is impossible to find, let alone punish, the perpetrators of outrages, Jimmy Harder soon became an economic necessity.

He had at one time been a cowpuncher. His dexterity with the braided cowhide rope which he kept in his trunk was well known. His skill with the heavy range gun, which quite frequently dangled from his hip in a low-hung holster, or was snugly concealed in a shoulder holster under his left armpit, was not so well known, but was shrewdly suspected. Not over five feet six in height, his weight somewhat under a hundred and forty, his quick motions, his springy step, his air of vibrant energy was in direct contrast to the soft drawl of his Texan speech.

Harder made the boat some fifteen minutes before sailing time, and, after relieving the sweating porters of his baggage, locked it in his stateroom and came up to the deck to get a breath of air and watch the preparations for casting loose.

She was a dirty packet, of the kind that is engaged in Chinese coastwise trade. The accommodations for first-class passengers, together with the navigating officers, were enclosed in a cage of steel bars. The general Chinese who shipped as deck-load passengers, were rigorously kept on the outer side of these bars. Only by carefully observing these precautions could a Chinese coaster continue in business. Otherwise, pirates would ship as deck passengers, watch their opportunity to overpower the navigating officers, and take the boat into some secluded bay for leisurely looting.

Harder was standing at the rail, staring moodily down into the muddy waters of the Whangpoo River, when he observed a rickshaw coolie run panting to the dock, fling himself back against the shafts of the rickshaw and come to a gasping stop.

A man of forty, fat, jovial, magnetic and perspiring, leisurely stepped from the rickshaw.

The bustle of activity which precedes the departure of a boat was already reaching its climax on the decks of the *Patoma*. The perspiring rickshaw coolie had evidently strained every muscle to reach the dock in time. His lean diaphragm heaved gasping breaths as he panted for air. His passenger seemed in no hurry whatever. A fat hand leisurely selected silver coins from the pocket of a sweat-soaked suit of Shantung pongee. The man dropped a single twenty cent piece of "small money" in the palm of the rickshaw coolie.

The coolie raised his voice in protest as his incredulous eyes stared at the minimum legal fee. When that protest had reached a wailing crescendo, the fat man took another silver piece from his hand, dropped it into the palm of the coolie and said simply, "Cumshaw."

The man still continued to protest, but now his protestations had lost the edge of bitter indignation.

Another rickshaw appeared, filled with baggage. There was a similar scene of paying, of protest and of "Cumshaw." Then porters started moving the man's baggage to the *Patoma*.

The fat man leisurely strolled up the gangplank.

Ten seconds after his feet hit the deck, the gangplank was pulled in. The whistle bellowed steamy sound, and the hull of the boat shivered as the engines trobbed into quick motion.

Jimmy Harder felt eyes upon him,

turned to see a young woman standing at the rail.

SHE WAS evidently American, apparently under thirty. In the States she would have been bright, alert and vivacious. But the tropics had placed its stamp upon her. Her eyes held a listless weariness. Her skin seemed tired with the effort of perpetual perspiration. But she managed a smile and said with impersonal friendliness to Jimmy, "That's what I call cutting it close."

Jimmy Harder removed his sun helmet from his head. He merely nodded, but the slow smile which accompanied the nod showed courteous appreciation of the comment and goodnatured agreement.

The fat man pushed his leisurely way up the stairs to the upper deck and stared at Jimmy Harder with hard, glittering eyes that seemed to have lost bubbling good nature in an attempt to make a quick readjustment of a delicate situation.

Jimmy nodded coolly, said nothing. The fat man bowed, walked to the opposite rail and placed his elbows on it.

The girl moved closer.

"You know him?" she said.

"Yes, ma'am," Harder said. "It's been several months since I've seen him. He plays a good game of chess."

"Who is he?"

"The name's Ballinger—George Ballinger."

"My name," she said, "is Edith Minter. I'm touring the Orient with my brother. I guess the four of us are the only first-class passengers."

"My name's Harder," Jimmy told her. "Where's your brother?"

"He's down in the stateroom trying to get the baggage in order."

"If he waits a couple of hours," Jimmy said, "he can breathe in the stateroom. If he ain't careful, he'll get a collapse, working down in a hot stateroom when the boat's tied up at the dock."

"You can't reason with him," she said. "He's impulsive."

Ballinger turned from the rail, came over and presented himself to Edith Minter.

He ignored Jimmy Harder, and Harder, in turn, kept his eyes on the swirling waters. After a few moments he raised his hat, bowed to Edith Minter and sought the lower deck.

She turned to Ballinger, regarded him with puzzled eyes, gave a low, nervous laugh.

"What a strange man," she commented.

Ballinger said, "Yes, I'm going down to play chess with him in a few moments. He's a wonderful chess player."

"You've known each other?"

"For years," Ballinger admitted, and laughed jovially. "Jimmy," he said, "hates me with a deep and bitter hatred."

"How interesting!" she said, a little bewildered.

"Oh, yes," he said. "Jimmy condescends to play chess with me. You see, he regards me as an opponent in everything. He represents a bunch of big business interests who are trying to keep law and order in China."

"And you?"

His laughed was booming and jovial.

"Jimmy *thinks*," he said, "that I represent rather an unscrupulous firm that deals in munitions of war; that I make my own arrangements to sell and deliver these munitions and that the ultimate effect is to encourage banditry and wars."

She stared at him searchingly.

"But doesn't it?" she asked.

He shook his head.

"No, ma'am," he told her gravely, "it doesn't. It's not the sale of munitions of war that makes for war; its underselling that causes war."

"How do you mean?"

"If," he said, "one force has twenty times as much munitions of war as another force has, there isn't any fight. I

sell all I can and promote peace and plenty."

She laughed, both at his earnestness and at his sophistry.

"You're going to be on this boat all the way to Hongkong?"

"That's right," he said, "and I wouldn't doubt if we voyaged farther together."

"You mean to Canton?"

"No," he said hastily, "Macao."

"Canton," she said, "is where we're going."

"We?"

"My brother and myself. My brother's down getting the baggage straightened around."

Ballinger shook his head lugubriously.

"He's got to cut that out," he said, "or he won't last long in the tropics. Don't worry about responsibilities in this country. Never hurry, never worry, never drink before noon, never go out in the sun when you can avoid it, never eat foods that aren't steaming hot, and you'll live to a ripe old age in the Orient."

She stared thoughtfully at the swirling waters, watched the skyline of Shanghai slipping astern.

"They say," she said, abruptly changing the subject, "there's a typhoon somewhere to the south."

Ballinger grinned.

"Never worry," he said. "That's one of the rules."

"But there *is* a typhoon, isn't there?"

"At this time of year," he said, "there's *always* a typhoon somewhere to the south."

"And yet you don't worry?"

He shook his head.

HALF an hour later, in company with her brother Sidney, Edith Minter again saw Ballinger, this time seated across the chess board from Jimmy Harder.

The two men played chess with a fierce antagonism that was vitally personal.

Sidney Minter, who was, himself, something of a chess expert, watched the progress of the game with a fascinated interest. Sidney Minter was tall, thin and nervous. There was a haunted expression about his eyes. His skin was shiny with the oily perspiration constant in that latitude from Spring 'till Fall.

Ballinger's game was directly opposed to the genial personality which he presented to the public. He played a tricky, treacherous game, laying traps by a succession of moves which were apparently careless, yet which were part of a carefully laid campaign.

Harder, on the other hand, played brilliantly aggressive game, his defense, at times, weakened by the swiftness of his attack. But Ballinger made no effort to assume the aggressive. He played a waiting game, organizing a perfect defense, giving several apparent openings to his opponent, openings which were, in fact, only invitations to his opponent to plunge headlong to destruction.

In the end, Jimmy Harder, ignoring the traps, masked his offensive with a few swift moves. Once past Ballinger's defense, Harder simply outplayed the other man, bringing pieces to bear upon the vulnerable point more rapidly than Ballinger could stiffen his defenses. Three major pieces fell in quick succession, and then Harder made two apparently aimless moves, while Ballinger tried to unite his crippled forces. There followed a swift move by Harder, and the game was over; Ballinger was checkmated by a master stroke of daring originality.

Neither man said a word as they reassembled the pieces for another game.

Sidney Minter spoke with feeling. "I say, you fellows play an extraordinary game. There are two distinct, individual types of play. Both of them acutely well developed."

Jimmy Harder merely flashed Minter a swift glance. Ballinger leaned back

from the board, stretched, grinned, and lit a cigarette.

"Sometimes I think the same rules apply to chess that apply to life. You can carve out your own career if you will only take the time to plan out a careful campaign."

"There's no question," Minter admitted, "but what a man shows his character and individuality in the type of game he plays."

Jimmy Harder's eyes showed quick interest.

"If you play enough chess with a man," he said, "you can tell just about the type of tactics he's going to use in any kind of a contest."

Ballinger looked suddenly thoughtful.

Minter nodded.

Neither Ballinger nor Harder spoke to the other.

The chess game continued. The *Patoma* wheezed down the river, left the mouth of the Whangpoo and turned into the yellow waters of the main river.

At dinner time the men discontinued their play. Five games had been played. Harder had penetrated Ballinger's defense by masterly aggressives in three of the games. Twice the supposedly weak point which Harder has assailed in Ballinger's defense had proven to be a cunningly laid trap.

The captain, weary-eyed, cynical and worried, sat at the table with the four first-class passengers. Edith Minter, recognizing the verbal restraint between Harder and Ballinger, tried her best to draw them into conversation.

She failed.

It was after the dinner hour, after cigars and cigarettes had been finished, while the intense heat which presaged the coming of a typhoon lay the lifeless waters, that Jimmy Harder sought the forward part of the deck. He seated himself against the steel bars, struck a match. The flickering flame illuminated his features.

A moment later, and there was a faint suggestion of sound.

Blackness covered the ship, a blackness so intent it was impossible to see a hand a foot from the eyes. The range lights of the steamer glowed as pale moons, illuminating portions of the masts. The engines throbbed regularly. The bow hissed through the turgid waters, where the river widened.

Harder spoke in a low voice, confident of receiving a reply, knowing that, despite the fact he had received no signal, Mow Jie would be perched precariously on the other side of the steel grating.

"What know you," he asked, "of that which is taking place in Canton?"

He spoke in the Cantonese dialect, his voice rippling smoothly through the nine tones which give to the language such a peculiar singsong effect.

Mow Jie answered him in the same language.

"Master," he said, "I have been listening and I have been talking. I listened much and talked little."

"What," Harder inquired, "have your ears learned?"

"There are many men on the ship," Mow Jie said. "They go south for some reason. I cannot learn the reason, Master, but this much I know: there are storm clouds to the south. I have heard talk of a mysterious one who is known by the title of Yeah Jing Suhn."

Harder translated the title—"The War Lord of Darkness." He said, musingly, "That is his title. And why do they call him that, Mow Jie?"

"As to that I know not," Mow Jie said. "I only know what my ears hear."

"There is talk of this one?"

"Much talk, my Master."

"And of what does the talk consist?"

"Only that the man is all powerful and invisible. Soon the weight of his hand will be felt upon the provinces of the south. He is to be invincible. He is to sweep all before him, and the night is his friend."

Harder rocked on his heels.

"It would be well," he said puffing his cigarette until the end flamed into hot

brilliance as an angry red star against the darkness, "to do more listening and with wider ears."

In the darkness could be heard the soft chuckle of Mow Jie, and after that was no further sound.

Harder tossed his cigarette over the rail and strode back to his cabin.

On the way he passed Ballinger, sprawled in a deck chair.

Ballinger coughed as Harder passed. It almost seemed that there was something significant about that cough.

Harder uttered a grim small grunt and went on.

THE FIVE men who sat in the front room of the big residence on The Peak at Hongkong were men who had seen much of China. They were not the type to become stampeded over trifles, nor were they the kind to underestimate danger.

More than two thousand feet below, in a direct line, were the lights of Hongkong. Across the bay showed the twinkling clusters of light which marked *Gow Loong*—called Kowloon by the whites, who failed to catch the delicate sounds of the Chinese language or to learn that the name meant Nine Dragons, which, to the Chinese mind, could plainly be seen half lying in the water, where the hills sent long, twisting yellow ridges out into the blue waters of the bay.

"I took the *Patoma*," Jimmy Harder said, "in order to save time."

"And ran right into the typhoon in the straits of Formosa," one of the men remarked.

Harder grinned.

"We got through, and that was about all. On the boat with me was George Ballinger."

The men exchanged significant glances.

"Do you," asked the spokesman, "know where he was going?"

"He said that he was going to Macao, but my man advises me that he sails tomorrow night for Canton."

The men once more exchanged significant glances. The spokesman, who was the head of one of the large corporations that held extensive investments in the Orient, leaned forward and lowered his voice.

"This much we know. Trouble is brewing above Canton. We cannot tell where. There has been an excessive amount of banditry. Huge ransoms have been demanded, and, in many instances, have been paid.

"Charles Belter went up to protect some of our interests, the interests of one of our members. He took a large sum of cash with him. He disappeared. We waited for the usual demands for ransom. None came. The day before we sent you the cablegram, a body was found floating down the river. The throat was cut from ear to ear in the neat, workmanlike fashion of bandits who know their throat cutting. About the wrist, tied by a thong, was the metal tag which had been issued to Belter when he took out insurance."

"How long had the man been dead?"

"That is something we can't tell accurately. Remember, the body was merely one of those that drift on by. There was no opportunity for a post mortem. Apparently he had been in the water for a week."

Jimmy Harder squinted thoughtfully.

"You don't think it was just ordinary banditry?"

"We can't possibly conceive of any reason why Belter would have left Canton without notifying us. We can't understand why he would have gone up river without a military escort, or without reporting to the consul in Canton."

"But he did go up the river?"

"He must have."

"It was his insurance tag?"

"Beyond a doubt. It's been verified from the records of the company."

"How much money was he carrying?"

The spokesman hesitated. Once more

the men exchanged significant glances.

"A very large sum," said the spokesman.

"You told me that before."

"More than one hundred thousand dollars," the spokesman said.

"How much more?"

"Quite a bit more."

"In cash?"

"Yes."

"Why was he carrying that in cash?"

"That," the spokesman said in a tone of finality, "is something which we can't explain."

"You want me to work on a case in the dark?"

"Yes."

"That," Harder said, "is putting me under rather a great handicap."

There was no comment.

Harder laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"All right, have it your own way. Tomorrow when the bank opens I want you gentlemen to pool a fund. You will get that fund from the banks. You will make every effort to keep the amount of that fund or its nature from becoming known—secrecy, let's say, to the point of ostentation. That fund will amount to two hundred thousand dollars. You will get the money in the form of large bills and they will be placed in a suitcase. You will have a duplicate suitcase prepared. Have both at the office when I call."

"Why all the money?" asked the spokesman.

Harder grinned.

"After I have left the office, carrying the duplicate suitcase, you can deposit the original amount in the bank."

"In other words, you're carrying a duplicate suitcase as a decoy."

"Exactly," Harder said.

The men looked at each other, taking that silent vote which comes from a perfect understanding.

The spokesman interpreted those almost imperceptible nods of the head.

"That," he said, "can be arranged."

THE NIGHT river boat to Canton carried the same four passengers who had been tossed about on the *Patoma* by the tropical typhoon.

As before, Ballinger and Harder did not bother to speak. It was Edith Minter who stared at Ballinger in surprise and said, "But I thought you were going to Macao."

"Changed my mind," he told her, grinning with extreme good nature, "and decided to take a run up to Canton."

"Business?"

He dismissed the question with a waving gesture of his hands.

"My child," he said, "there is no business. Business, in case you haven't heard, is dead."

Jimmy Harder, carrying a light airplane trunk which contained his clothes, a bag which contained his toilet kit and sundries, and another mysterious black bag which never left his possession, was a glum and taciturn passenger. When Edith Minter questioned him, he made no attempt to disguise his mission.

"Business," he said.

"Mr. Ballinger tells me that it is your business to keep peace in the Orient. It seems to me that is rather a large order."

"Did Ballinger say it's a large order?"

"No, I just said that it would be."

"It is."

"You are headed for Canton?"

"Yes."

"Tell me, is there any danger of pirates?"

"You mean on the trip?"

"Yes."

"Why," he said, "do you ask that question?"

"Because of all the precautions they take. We're locked in behind steel bars as though we were precious gems. There are two boats run by competing companies, and yet they both leave at the same time, so one can give aid to the other in case of a pirate attack. There is a third boat that comes up from Macao and joins in the procession."

"Who told you all this?"

"Mr. Ballinger. He seems to know a great deal about China."

"Then," Harder said with a slow smile, "It's the precautions that are taken against an attack by pirates that make you think there is danger, is that it?"

"What else could I think?" she said. "Look at the navigating offices, they're shut off by steel doors that are bullet proof. There are slits in them and a Sikh guard stands constantly on duty with a loaded gun in his hands."

"If," he told her, "the precautions were not taken, there would be danger."

"As it is, there isn't?"

"There is always danger in China!" And, raising his hat, he walked away and entered his cabin. Nor did he emerge until the river boat was splashing through the waters of the river just below Canton.

Once through the Canton Customs, both Ballinger and Jimmy Harder loaded their luggage into respective rickshaws and gave directions in low tones. Edith Minter and her brother went at once to the Victoria Hotel and made no secret of their destination. Neither Harder nor Ballinger showed up at the hotel, nor did they seem to be on the Island of Shameen at all.

Down by the front of the river, where the Street of Shifting Sand joined the Street of Increasing Sand, was a little insignificant structure, given over apparently to the manufacture of wicker baskets. In the back of this structure, clad in Chinese garments, a tight fitting skull cap with a red button on his head, Jimmy Harder squatted on his heels, native fashion, and waited.

Mow Jie brought him a report shortly before noon.

"The Fat One," he said, "has chartered a junk to take him four days journey up river."

"It is well," said Harder. "We, too, journey four days upstream. We leave this afternoon. Remember, you are the servant of a poor but worthy man who desires to express thanks to the gods at the upriver monastery for the granting of a favor which has been bestowed upon him through the benificence of the gods."

Mow Jie gave his peculiar quiet chuckle.

"A man who is very worthy," he said, "and very, very poor. It would be well if you were a poor silk merchant."

Jimmy Harder nodded slow acquiescence. Already he had commenced to steep his soul in the character of the Chinese he was to impersonate.

It took him approximately two hours to complete his disguise. When he emerged from the store, he was to all intents and purposes a Chinese of the middle class. The skull cap concealed bits of adhesive tape by which the corners of his eyes were drawn up. The expression in his black eyes was typically Chinese, the expression of one who has "retired within himself," or, as the Chinese sometimes call it, "the art of holding face."

That afternoon, the big junk pulled away from its anchorage, with much clashing of cymbals; with an appropriate barrage of firecrackers that the devils might be frightened away; with tin cans containing burning incense sticks in the living quarters in the stern of the big junk.

With a stern wind, it was possible to get some assistance from the huge sails, in addition to which there were an extra number of polers to tread the long runways along the side of the boat. For Harder, despite his protestations of poverty, had seen to it that the junk was equipped with extra men so that progress could be materially speeded if necessary.

The trip up the river started without incident. Apparently, all was to proceed smoothly.

Just at dusk, however, Mow Jie sought out Harder.

"Observe," he said in a low voice, "the junk which is coming down the river."

Harder's eyes shifted to it, and then glanced to Mow Jie.

"One of the boatmen," said Mow Jie, tells me that this junk started up the river ahead of us, bearing a fat man whose laugh shook the timbers of the vessel."

Jimmy Harder kept in character as a Chinese silk merchant. His face remained perfectly bland and expressionless.

"Perhaps our junk men will veer over close so that they can make *keng gie* with the boatmen of the other junk."

Mow Jie puffed placidly at the long-stemmed bamboo pipe with its stained ivory mouthpiece.

"Orders that this shall be done have already been given, First Born."

The junk veered its course, swung over toward the other junk. Voices raised in a shrill chatter.

A man who lay on a rude stretcher, raised himself awkwardly to a sitting position. It was George Ballinger, his left arm splinted and arranged in a sling which hung from his neck.

The Chinese, satisfied that the white passenger could not understand their language, engaged in animated comment.

"The fat swine tripped and fell," one of the polers of the other junk reported. "Ai-i-i, ah-h-h, but they are awkward, these white devils. Fat as a larded pig, he is. He had no work to do, nothing but to sit all the day on a stool. And mark you what happened—he even fell from the stool and broke his arm. Ai-i-i, ah-h-h, but he is clumsy."

"He goes back to Canton?" called Mow Jie, entering the conversation with the freemasonry of garrulous Chinese the world over.

"He goes back to Canton to see the white doctor in the mission. He cannot stand the pain. He is becoming quite drunk. How fortunate are these fat pigs who spend their lives sitting on stools and drinking liquor. Money he has in plenty."

"Perhaps," said Mow Jie cautiously, "the bandits would pay a good price for him, and then—"

"Ai-i-i, ah-h-h," said the poler. "He is hard, this man. His left arm may be broken, but his right is not. He carries a big gun, and he knows how to us it. Moreover, who are we to deal with bandits? To be true, the bandits would give us a price for our fat pig, and then we, too, should become fat pigs made wealthy by the price that the bandits paid us. What would prevent the bandits from then cutting our throats in order to retrieve the money they had paid us?"

Mow Jie acknowledged the correctness of the other's logic. "Blessed is poverty to the man with a full belly," he said. "He may sleep in comfort, with no one to cut his throat."

The polers bent to their task, urged by the sudden curses of George Ballinger, who stormed that his arm was paining him, and that ten thousand devils tortured his bones, and that the Cantonese police would levy a fine against the junk if it did not make the downstream trip to Canton before ten o'clock.

As the junks swung apart, Mow Jie's chuckle reached Harder's ears.

"He is very smart, this white ghost," he said, "but he falls from his stool and breaks his arm, and now the gods of fortune have smiled upon us."

The captain of the junk approached, clasped his hands together before his heart, agitated them gently.

"Such humble food as we have been able to prepare aboard our floating hovel," he said, "is ready for your evening meal."

His face perfectly expressionless, Harder said formally in Chinese, "You have prepared too much, ten times ten times too much." Then, "and now we can eat in peace. There are no white ghosts preceding us up the river."

The captain of the junk shook his head.

"There are two more."

Harder's face remained impassive, but it was only because of an effort.

"Two more?"

"Yes," said the captain, "a man and a woman. They arrived on the boat from Hongkong and went to the hotel at Shameen, but within an hour they were on their way up the river."

Jimmy Harder turned away so that the Chinese might not see the baffled frown which creased his forehead.

To himself he swore a little in expressive English.

A MOON in the first quarter, and the master of the junk kept the crew on duty until it became so dark as to make navigation hazardous. Then the junk slid in close to the bank and came to anchor. Weary men dropped at once to the hard boards of the deck, and fell instantly into slumber.

Jimmy Harder sat on a bit of bamboo matting, his legs crossed, the silken folds of his garments covering his arms and ankles against the insidious attack of the furry-winged mun jie which flew noiselessly along the deck of the junk, seldom rising more than an inch above the planks, mosquitoes that were almost invisible, utterly silent and exceedingly poisonous.

The moon went down; slid down into the darkness of the west. Night gripped the river with a veil of impenetrable blackness. Jimmy Harder put *sook yen* into the pewter bowl of the Chinese pipe. The oily tobacco sizzled against the hot metal, and the greasy smoke seeped from the corners of his mouth, filling the night air with a villainous odor. His mind was filled with disquieting thoughts.

A hundred yards up stream, another junk, also tied up for the night, swung slowly at the end of its anchor cable. It was too dark to see more than vague outlines, and on the rivers of China, when junks are strange to each other, it is a part of etiquette to keep a sufficient distance.

Harder's eyes focused themselves absently upon the other junk, which showed merely as a black blotch against the grey darkness of that portion of the Western night, which, thanks to the setting moon, was not as yet completely impenetrable.

Suddenly he saw a flash from the deck of the junk, followed a moment later by the roar of a report. There were other flashes; other reports; the sound of shrill Chinese voices jabbering in terror, then the patter of bare feet on the deck, and the splash of something striking water.

A woman's scream rose high and shrill in the darkness.

Harder could have sworn that it was the scream of a white woman. He got to his feet, holding the forgotten pipe in his right hand, his eyes straining into the darkness.

There was the bellow of a man's voice, and Harder knew at once that it was the voice of a white man. There were more flashes, and then the hubbub of rapid conversation. Harder thought for a moment that he could see a dark shape slipping silently by on the river, a shape that might have been a moving sampan covered with cloth to keep the light of the heavens from reflecting upon the polished deck of the tiny craft. There was, however, nothing tangible. He saw only a suggestion of darkness moving through darkness.

A voice spoke at his side.

"That," Mow Jie said, "will be the man and his sister who moved on up the river."

There had been no sound. Harder had no idea how Mow Jie had known where he was, or how he had reached his side with such silent efficiency, but he said without surprise, "Get the captain, Mow Jie. We will move up to the other junk and see what has happened."

SIDNEY MINTER had no idea that the Chinese silk merchant who had chartered the junk for a trip to the up-river monastery was, in reality, the white man whose chess playing had furnished him with so much interest on the trip from Shanghai to Hongkong, and so he conversed in Pidgin English, in the most approved style.

"My sister scream. I come topside. One piecee man makum shoot. I makum shoot. Two piecee men makum shoot. I shoot some more. Everybody shoot. My sister scream I go very fast place where she scream. No can find. One piecee man swing knife. I hit him my fist. Allee same knockum overboard. He make big splash. No more shots. I shout very loud no can find my sister. Somebody bring light, my sister gone. Must do something, must do something very quick."

Jimmy Harder, squatting on the bamboo mat, puffing meditatively upon the pipe, let his face show no faintest flicker of expression. He turned instead to Mow Jie and said in Cantonese, "Interpret to me the words of the white devil. I do not understand the meaningless rattle of the tongue against the top of his mouth."

Mow Jie nodded and proceeded to elaborate upon the other's speech, while Jimmy Harder's face retained its placid repose, despite the anxious pleading scrutiny of Sidney Minter.

"Must do something," Minter said. "My men no savee. My men very much frightened. My men say *no* can do. I say *can* do. Must do something very quick. Very much danger. Must find sister damn quick. Can do?"

Mow Jie answered him in the laconic fashion of the Chinese coolie who recognizes the utter impossibility of that which is hopeless.

"No can do."

Harder, in Cantonese, said to Mow Jie, "Ask him why he and his sister came up the river."

Mow Jie interpreted the question in Pidgin English.

Sidney Minter hesitated as though debating whether a falsehood was worth while. Then, apparently deciding that it was not, he said, "My uncle, Charles Belter, come up river and die. He leave big fortune, and no can get money unless can show he is dead. I get letter from one piecee man in Canton. He say come to Canton and he can show me my uncle dead."

Mow Jie asked a direct question. "You come for money?"

Sidney Minter gave him a direct answer. "Come for money. Not see my uncle long time. I sorry he dead, but sometime he must die. Get his money now very good, wait too long for money, too many lawyers, too little money."

Mow Jie grunted to show that he understood.

Jimmy Harder lowered his voice, and spoke in Chinese as though making a comment merely by way of suggestion.

"Wait a minute, Mow Jie, I think perhaps we have been tricked. I thought that I saw a sampan covered with a black cloth slipping along the water near our junk. My eyes are the eyes of a man, but your eyes are the eyes of a cat. What did you see?"

"I saw that which was black," said Mow Jie, "moving upon the waters. It was a boat covered with a black cloth, passing close. My ears heard the sound of heavy breathing, the breathing which is made by a woman when a hand is held over her mouth."

Harder said slowly, "This Fat One is very clever. He thinks of many schemes; his mind is full of trickery. I have studied him over the chess board, and I know the way he thinks. He lays traps.

"You see, we do not *know* that his arm was broken. He fell from a stool, and had the men tie up his arm with splints and put it in a sling. Then he told them to put back to Canton.

"After all, Little Cat, if this Fat One went to Canton, it was because he wished to go to Canton. By starting up the river, he has taken me out of Canton."

Mow Jie grunted assent to the reasoning.

"There is danger," Harder went on. "That danger is in Canton. This white man is as a child to China. Up the river there is safety. Where the Fat One is, is danger. Tell him that with the first coming of dawn, he is to go up the stream to look for his sister; that we will go back to Canton and report to the authorities."

"Ai-i-i, ah-h-h, what good is it to tell the authorities of that which takes place up the river!" Mow Jie demanded. "They cannot control that which?"

"Peace," Harder told him. "I do not tell you that which we will do, I tell you that which you are to tell the white ghost we will do."

And once more Mow Jie's soft amused chuckle came to Jimmy Harder's ears.

The junk slid noiselessly down the stream like some great bat drifting through the night. Such light as came from the heavens reflected from the waters, so that it was possible to see a ribbon of greyish darkness stretching ahead of the junk—a ribbon which was surrounded by a wall of thick velvety darkness.

The big craft moved forward silently, save for occasional creaks and groanings.

Jimmy Harder continued to sit in the bow, his eyes fixed in a thoughtful stare.

All about him was darkness. He could see only that faint greying of the blackness which marked the course of the river ahead.

He heard motion in the darkness at his side, and knew that Mow Jie had sought him out with his unerring and catlike ability to find his noiseless way through the darkness.

"They will not be looking for us to turn back to Canton," Harder said. "Unless they continue to travel at top speed, we may catch them."

"Have been hearing much," said the voice of Mow Jie, "concerning this Yeah Jing Suhn, this War Lord of Darkness."

"What have you heard?" asked Harder.

"No one knows where he is or who he is. He comes in the dark and goes in the dark. His men dress entirely in black after the sun has set, and carry out his bidding. His empire is constantly growing. It is rumored that before another moon, his men will strike in the darkness, and that the streets of Canton will run blood."

"What does he want?" Harder asked.

"An independent South China," said Mow Jie. "China must either divide or be doomed. Already the North of China is helpless. Within two years it will be completely under Japanese influence, and if South China remains with North China, it will be absorbed by the same process. If, however, South China separates from North China, the Japanese will be busy with North China and will neglect the South China for years."

"Foolish," said Jimmy Harder. "Japan does not want China. Japan wants to cement China to her in bonds of friendship and protection."

"It is not for me," said Mow Jie, "to dispute the words of the First Born. You have studied much of politics."

Harder said nothing, and after a moment Mow Jie's voice went on, speaking, "But I have studied much of the Japanese. It takes Asia to understand Asia."

And he chuckled that peculiar dry chuckle.

Harder had trained himself to suffer necessary inactivity in patience. He retained his energy, his quick moving efficiency, but he retained it only because he knew when it was hopeless to bump his head against the brick wall of Oriental impassivity. As a result, he now sat motionless, staring with placid

countenance into the darkness, his mind teeming with thoughts of political intrigue which was about to shape the history of the world.

The slow creakings of the heavy junk; the faint lap-lap-lapping of water at the bows; the warmth of the tropical night, all combined to merge his thoughts into warm drowsiness.

His eyes drooped. Once more he heard the rustle of motion at his side.

"Tell me, Mow Jie," he said, drowsily, "does this War Lord of Darkness intend to massacre those who are opposed to him?"

The answer was in Chinese and in a strange voice. "Who are you to ask concerning Yeah Jing Suhn?"

Harder stiffened to sudden wakefulness. His right hand crept to the weapon which was under his armpit.

"Who speaks?"

"One of the darkness," said the strange voice.

"You are one of the crew?" Harder asked, giving great care to the tonal inflections of his voice, so that the other might not suspect he was talking with a white man.

"I am not of the crew," said the strange Chinese. "I am not of the junk. I am of the darkness. I move in the dark, coming where I please and going where I please."

"And why does it please you to come into my humble presence?" Harder asked, his hand slipping the blued-steel revolver from its shoulder holster.

"Because," said the voice, "this junk was headed upstream. It anchored for the night, and now it is headed downstream. You are a silk merchant going to the monastery for the purpose of keeping vows. It would well suit the purpose of Yeah Jing Suhn to have you continue to the monastery. After all, breaking your vows to the gods is not a thing to be done lightly."

Straining his eyes into the darkness, Harder could make out a shadowy figure, showing vaguely indistinct against the darker shadows yet unmistakable.

"It makes a difference to you, as well as to the gods?" he asked, shifting the revolver so that it was pointing directly at the center of the vaguely indistinct figure.

"It makes a difference," said the voice. "You are Jee Mah Wei. You start up the river in your junk. You anchor for the night. You turn and start down the river. Yeah Jing Suhn does not like it."

"You speak for the War Lord of Darkness?"

"I am the Ward Lord of Darkness, and I have come to tell you that you must enlist yourself upon my side, or you must die."

Harder braced himself against the expected recoil of the weapon which he held in his right hand.

"You bring death?"

"I bring you an ultimatum."

"I," Jimmy Harder said, "join forces with no man."

"You are," his visitor went on, "standing in my way. You started up the river as Jee Mah Wei, a silk merchant, going to the monastery. You are not important. By turning your junk around and starting down river, you have become important. Yeah Jing Suhn says that you are to join with him and throw off the domination of all foreign nations, leaving a free China. Otherwise, you are to die."

Harder could feel perspiration dampening his hand where he gripped the butt of the revolver. His ears were attuned to the darkness, listening intently for that faint rustle of silken garments which would inevitably precede the thrust of a knife.

He heard nothing.

His eyes, straining themselves into the darkness, seemed to play tricks upon him. At first, he felt certain he could see the outlines of the figure Then he was not so certain. The muscles of his eyes ached. There was a smarting sensation, and then he felt moisture about his eyelids.

"I join with no man," he said, "and I do not die."

He lunged forward with his left hand outstretched at the point where he thought he would encounter the other's throat. The revolver was in his right hand, close to his side, ready to roar into action should he feel the bite of steel.

He toppled off balance; fell to the deck; floundered about, groping with wide swinging circles of his left arm for the legs of his adversary. His hand encountered nothing save empty darkness.

Harder got to his feet, and flattening himself against the side of the jung, listening.

He heard nothing save the creak of the junk and the lap of the waters.

He raised his voice, yelling in Chinese, "Bring light! Pirates!"

AT THE sound of the dread cry, men came to life all over the boat. Sleepers apparently so sunk in oblivion that they would not have heard the sound of a gun, came leaping into activity at the alarm announcing the presence of the salt water thieves.

Here and there lights flickered about the boat. The master jabbered like a monkey, running up and down the deck of the boat brandishing a huge knife and shouting instructions to the cowed boatmen.

Lights flickered in a systematic search, which showed that there was no sign of pirates; no sign of any other craft sufficiently near to the junk to be visible in the flare of the torches, but the lights showed also that Mow Jie was missing. The Cat Man had been swallowed into the darkness, as though invisible hands had lifted him from the junk.

Near the stern of the junk, lying on the platform pathway built out for the men who wielded the poles, a strange Chinese lay. He was clad entirely in garments of black silk, and his throat was cut from ear to ear, a most workmanlike job of throat cutting.

Harder pushed forward, feeling his way along the narrow platform pathway.

"Who is this one?"

The master grunted a swift order. Two of the boatmen stooped. There was a splash. The boatmen straightened. A dull red stain on the teak wood pathway was all that was left to mark the presence of the stranger garbed in black.

"There was no one," said the junk captain blandly.

Jimmy Harder knew his China. His face was expressionless in the flickering glare of the torches.

"There was no one," he agreed, and turned to shuffle back along the narrow runway. Behind him he heard the splash of water, as buckets brought up the muddy river water and sloshed it over the boards where the spreading stain of red marked the place where the body had been found.

All about were mysterious waters and darkness. Mow Jie was missing. As well have asked the captain to scuttle his junk as to stay in the vicinity and search for Mow Jie.

Jimmy Harder knew his China. He also knew his responsibility. Momentarily, the junk was moving farther from the place where Mow Jie had disappeared, yet there was nothing which could be done. Such was the philosophy of China.

Jimmy Harder once more complacently resumed his seat on the mat; picked up his long handled bamboo pipe, philosophically stuffed *sook yen* into the pewter bowl. He struck a match, and puffed the hissing tobacco into smoke.

If it had been written that his man was to be swallowed by the dark river, it was written, and there was nothing that could be done about it. His attitude proclaimed his Oriental philosophy, and distracted attention from himself.

There was a scrubbing sound from the rear of the junk as the last vestige of the red stain was being removed.

Jimmy Harder glanced swiftly about him. He had taken up his position near the edge of the boat. No one was paying any particular attention to him. He leaned over, inspecting the dark waters, straining his eyes downward, trying to get a glimpse of the water, staring into the wall of darkness.

One by one, the torches flickered out.

Jimmy Harder tossed the bamboo pipe into the water. He heard the hissing sound as the water struck the glowing tobacco and the hot metal bowl.

He took a deep breath; leaned slightly more forward, and went down into the river with a clean dive that was virtually without noise.

The muddy water got in his eyes and nostrils. He took three swift underwater strokes; came to the surface; took a deep breath of the night air.

The black shape of the junk slid smoothly past him. The last torch was extinguished as the stern blotted out what little illumination the overcast sky gave.

Jimmy Harder took a deep breath, turned over and started moving with slow, powerful strokes back against the sluggish current of the river, up toward the place where the junk must have been when Mow Jie so mysteriously disappeared, and his place taken by Yeah Ying Suhn, the War Lord of Darkness.

THE water was warm. Jimmy Harder's light silk garments became wet and clung to him, offering but little resistance. He was a powerful swimmer and as much at home in the water as a seal.

Swimming slowly, silently, keeping his hands well under water, using a stroke that gave him plenty of speed without too great expenditure of energy, Harder kept working up the current, following as nearly as he could the wake of the junk.

Harder's mind was filled with dark forebodings. He felt certain that Mow Jie would not have voluntarily jumped from the junk, and he knew that no amount of money could have induced Mow Jie to desert.

The clouds which hung low over the heavens shortly before the moon set, and which made the darkness of the night almost impenetrable, began to break. Sufficient light from the stars filtered through to give some degree of visibility. From his position, low on the surface of the water, Harder could see more clearly than from the deck of the junk.

Harder began to feel the handicap of the silken garments. He managed to slip out of the loose upper garment, rolled it into a ball and thrust it through his belt. He struck out again, and almost at once saw something dark swirling around in the water.

He swam toward it, and even as he did so, the thing sank from sight. Harder dove, groped with his hands and encountered an inert body.

He dragged the body to the surface, feeling no doubt in his mind that he was holding the last mortal remains of Mow Jie, the Cat Man, who had given his life for the man whom he served.

Turning on his back, Harder's fingers explored the man's features. He suddenly recoiled.

At once, Harder realized that which he held. He pulled it alongside so that he could get some faint glimpse of the color of the garments. His surmise was correct. The body was the one which had been pitched from the junk, the body of the man garbed entirely in dark clothes.

Harder turned the body loose.

Harder swam onward, moving more slowly now, realizing that he was nearing the place where the junk lay when the attack took place. Down close to the waters, he could see patches of star-studded sky. Far over to the left, he

observed the bulk of a junk rising against the stars, and abruptly became conscious of something which was moving between the junk and his eyes—a dark formless blotch which slipped silently over the murky waters.

Harder turned and struck out toward this mysterious dark object, taking care to swim with the utmost silence.

His disguise was no longer of use. The water had washed away much of the stain which had colored his skin. The skullcap had drifted down stream, uncovering the bits of adhesive tape which had pulled up the corners of his eyes.

Harder was contemplating taking off the rest of his silken Chinese garments, when he saw that which was ahead of him, and which had been moving toward the junk as a formless mass of darkness.

It was a sampan covered with black cloth, and it was being sculled with consummate skill, making it move like some black iceberg that might have been spewed forth from some inky glacier of darkness.

Harder followed along behind the sampan, saw it slide in close to the junk, then swing around to the other side so that the high hull of the junk hid that which was taking place from both his eyes and ears.

Harder moved more rapidly now, trying to gain a position from which he could see what was taking place, but he was too late. Whatever errand the sampan may have had, it was completed before Harder could reach the junk, for he saw the sampan slide out from beneath the junk's high stern and skim swiftly over the water with the silent speed of a frightened duck.

Harder realized that he could not remain indefinitely in the water. He knew only too well the danger of watchful eyes which might be keeping secret vigil on the decks of the junk, but sooner or later he had to board that junk. Mow Jie, his friend and ally, had either been knifed and dropped into the enveloping waters of the river, or he had, quite probably, been imprisoned aboard that junk.

Harder slowed his strokes, slipped cautiously along, taking care to make no faintest ripple. Swinging down stream, he swam slowly up under the high stern of the junk, slipping under the overhang, clinging to the rudder support, climbing up until he could reach the lower edge of the platform above the rudder.

His silk clothing was wet, and, as he gained height the water running out of the garments made dripping noises which were all too audible in the close stillness of the night.

Harder clung there against the high stern, waiting for the water to drain from the silk, listening intently for any significant noises.

He heard the soft, swishing sound of bare feet moving on the platform above his head, heard a guttural voice, and then the feet marched on. There was the sound of a door opening and closing. A Chinese voice gave a startled exclamation and then was silent.

Somewhere above him a man was snoring steadily, rhythmically.

Farther forward, and on the opposite side of the junk, a sampan was moored. From time to time, it rubbed gently against the junk, and the scraping noise of wood on wood vibrated through the big craft. Harder was irritated that junk men should leave a sampan where it would rub, but he realized that the only reason for leaving it in that position was either that it was to be immediately required on the shortest of notice, or else that it had been used to bring someone aboard the junk—a someone who had to be carried, and who had, therefore, been loaded at the lowest point in the curve of the junk's deck.

Harder found a small projection under the overhang of the platform above him. Perched upon this, he ascertained that

his gun was still in working order.

Harder had learned much about firearms in the moist tropics. Moreover, he realized that one who sails on a river may, upon occasion, find himself in a river. He had, therefore, taken the precaution of putting paraffine over the shells, coating the working parts with paraffine. He had, moreover, chosen one of the more durable double-action revolvers of a standard type, with few working parts to get out of order.

He convinced himself that the gun was in proper working order. He could hear no further sounds on the platform above him, and, holstering the gun, raised his hands to the platform, pulled himself up until he could fling up a leg and worm his way up to a point from which he could look down along the deck of the junk.

He could see only a faint suggestion of shadowy outlines, and, as he was trying to focus his eyes, a door opened. Light streamed out in a golden pathway, and into that golden pathway of light, hulking first as a black grotesque shadow which squirmed along the deck, and then showing as a fat figure, catching the illumination of the peanut oil lamp, from within the room, came George Ballinger, his face wreathed in smiles, his voice booming, cordial.

"All right," he said, "you catchum money, I catchum guns. You come top side money, I come top side guns."

He strode across the deck, groping his way along the rail after his pounding strides had taken him beyond the pathway of illumination which came from the doorway. The sling and splints had been removed from his arm.

A boatman stood up in the sampan which had been rubbing against the side of the junk.

Harder knew then why the sampan had been waiting there.

Ballinger raised a whistle to the mouth, blew three, shrill blasts.

Ballinger, standing by the rail of the junk, was apparently peering into the night, searching for something that was to happen in response to his whistled signal.

Harder, therefore, stood up and scanned the blackness of the river night, trying also to see that which Ballinger expected.

His eyes immediately focused upon a dull red glare which showed reflected against the clouds. As he looked, he saw a tongue of flame come into view. Shortly afterwards there were more flames, then a rolling cloud of black smoke which swirled up from above angry red flames.

The smoke twisted and turned in heat-tortured agony, and drifted down the sky.

As the flames mounted higher, Harder was able to see the outline of masts, and, to his ears, softened by distance, came the screams of men in agony.

Harder understood. The War Lord of Darkness had issued orders. The sampan covered with the black cloth, which slipped away into the darkness, had been filled with men taken from the junk—men who were ordered to overtake the junk upon which Harder had been traveling and see that it did not reach Canton.

Harder's mind working rapidly, recognized what must have happened. Yeah Jing Suhn, the War Lord of Darkness, intent upon mapping out a campaign which would catch the City of Canton utterly by surprise, dependent only upon the receipt of a vast store of munitions of war from Ballinger's company, had been most unwilling that the news of Edith Minter's abduction should reach Canton, bringing up an investigating patrol of Chinese gunboats.

Not that the War Lord of Darkness entertained any doubt as to his ability to dispose of Edith Minter. That would have been most easy, but any extensive investigation would undoubtedly have disclosed that which Ballinger was to deliver—the munitions of war which would be used by Yeah Jing Suhn in

surprising Canton, and carrying out the ruthless massacre which he had planned.

Harder calculated that Ballinger's whistles were not a signal for firing the junk. That had been arranged for earlier, when the black covered sampan had slid in close to the junk, pausing long enough to take on board a sufficient crew of cut-throats to make certain that the junk could be overpowered, burned, and the members of the crew put to the sword before they could reach Canton with an alarm.

Harder had, therefore, through his desire to reach Mow Jie, unwittingly saved his own life. He shuddered as he thought of what must have happened on that junk; the dark sampan which had glided invisibly to the stern; the half-naked crew of cut-throats that had swarmed up to the runways, moving stealthily upon their bare feet, until, at a signal, they plunged upon the helpless crew.

Apparently, some of the crew had been chained to the burning junk, for the screams and cries were still audible at this distance.

Once more Ballinger raised the whistle to his lips, and blew three impatient blasts.

From the darkness came the sound of an answering whistle.

A moment later Harder could hear the grunts of men as they strove in sweating unison to pole up a huge junk, the form of which loomed suddenly in black silhouette against the angry red glow of the clouds illuminated by the burning of the junk.

Ballinger evidently saw the junk also, for he stepped in the sampan with an exclamation of satisfaction.

The sampan immediately pulled away and started crossing the black gap of water.

Harder heard the muffled scream of a woman, a scream that was shrill with terror and was almost immediately muffled, as though a hand had been clapped over her mouth.

He heard the sounds of struggle, sounds which were plainly audible to his ears, although Ballinger, seated in the sampan did not so much as turn his head.

There was a swirl of motion, the noise of a Chinese screaming in pain. Then the woman screamed again, a shrill treble scream of frenzied fear.

A woman ran from the cabin, out into the pathway of light which streamed from the door. She turned, and Harder caught sight of her face.

It was Edith Minter. Her face was chalk-white, her eyes wide and staring. Her lips parted as she emitted another sudden scream.

A Chinese, a knife in his hand, lunged toward her.

Jimmy Harder calmly lined the sights of his gun and pulled trigger.

The weapon roared. The lunging Chinese lurched, sprawled to the deck.

THERE was a moment of sudden tense silence. Ballinger, seated in his sampan, turned to stare, his form, clad in white silks, showing vaguely indistinct below the blurred oval of his white face.

The junk seemed strangely silent. It was as though the sound of the shot had made men motionless, as well as speechless, with surprise.

"This way, Edith," called Jimmy Harder.

She ran blindly toward him. She had lost her shoes, and he could hear the pound of her bare feet on the planks of the deck.

Ballinger's sampan whirled swiftly, in response to a guttural command, and the boatman sculled back toward the junk. From the junk that was being poled came the sounds of startled cries, topped by a shrill question flung out into the hot night by a surprised Chinese.

"Whasa malla? Whasa malla? Whasa malla?"

Ballinger's voice boomed across the water:

"Maybeso makum much trouble. Stay

away. You no come this side."

The man snoring on the high stern sat up with the first sound of the commotion. He saw the indistinct white of Edith Minter running toward him. With a grunt of satisfaction he lunged forward.

Jimmy Harder had vaulted the low rail, was on the deck. Two swift strides, a flash of his wrist, and the barrel of his weapon *thunked* down on the man's skull. The boatman lurched to his knees, gave a peculiar *whooshing* sigh and dropped to his face.

A figure appeared in the lighted doorway of the cabin, a figure that held Jimmy Harder's attention as the light shone upon its face.

The man was attired in a flaming red jacket above black pantaloons. A skullcap of black, trimmed with a zigzag border of red and surmounted by a red button, was on his head. The eyes held a strange sardonic look of cynical appraisal. The lips were twisted into a cruel leer, a leer which was the more emphasized by a black, stringy mustache which hung down on either side of the upper lip.

His fingernails were long and stained, until they seemed like great yellow claws. In his right hand he held a slender steel dagger, the point of which had been dipped in a jade box. The box was held open in his left hand, and the light from the cabin illuminated the green venom in the box. The calm, deadly deliberation of the man was hypnotic to behold.

Harder knew at once that this was the face of a leader, a man with the warped intellect which comes from frequent wooing of the poppy, and he knew of that which the box contained—a substance know as *look took yok,* the deadly green poison known to some of the old mandarins, a poison which paralyzes instantly and brings on agonized rapid death.

The man in the doorway spoke.

He seemed not in the least excited. The eyes took in the situation with that expression of sardonic appraisal which seemed so coldly emotionless.

"Death to the *bak gwiee loe,*" he called, speaking in Cantonese.

Instantly the darkness rang with shrill cries, the sound of pattering feet as men ran toward the rail.

Ballinger whipped out an automatic. In the excitement of the moment he forgot his pidgin English. Lights flared, now close to the side of the junk, was plainly visible. Gone was the urbane geniality of his manner. His bull voice bellowed across the water.

"You damn double-crossing, yellow-bellied son of a heathen Chinee! I knew you were up to some deviltry!" he shouted. "You were going to stick me with a poisoned dagger after I'd got the money and you'd got the munitions. To hell with you! You'll never see them. I'll sink them in the bottom of the river or blow them up before you get a crack at them!"

Edith Minter joined Jimmy Harder.

"You!" she exclaimed in a throaty whisper.

"Yes," he said, "what did they want?"

"Ransom," she said. "They took me, and left my brother so that he could raise the ransom. But there was some sort of a dispute. Something happened, and they decided they had to attack Canton at once. I couldn't understand what it was all about. There was a man there who told me some things. He could speak English fairly well. He—"

The smooth voice of the Chinese who stood in the doorway interrupted. He was speaking in excellent English, and there was taunting mockery in his tones, as he answered Ballinger.

"It is rather late in the game for abuse," he said, "and it happens you no longer have power to block the delivery of munitions. Within a few moments my men will be returning. Now that we know the location of the prize we see, I fancy we can take it."

Ballinger gave an inarticulate roar of

rage. He swung around and fired the heavy automatic twice from the hip.

Flame spurted from the weapon. A long, jagged, yellow splinter appeared in the doorway within an inch of the head of the man who held the green-tipped dagger. The second bullet thudded into the thick planking.

The man in the doorway flipped his wrist. The dagger glittered in the light as it flashed out into the region of darkness.

Ballinger flung himself to one side, and the very violence of his effort rocked the sampan and sent the big form splashing into the river. The knife whizzed through the air and embedded itself in the wood of the light sampan.

Ballinger's hands splashed at the water. The unexpected nature of his immersion had caused him to drop his automatic, and, as his hands appeared above the surface of the water, splashing in the futile strokes of a man who cannot swim, the mocking laugh of Yeah Jing Suhn, the War Lord of Darkness, rippled across the dark ribbon of water.

There was something compelling about that man who stood in the doorway, his eyes looking at that which went on about him with the expression of a cynical, sophisticated observer who is watching a play being performed on the stage and whose face shows a sarcastic superiority to the mummery of the footlights.

His voice rang out, this time in Cantonese, "The Fat Pig has dropped his gun. He is like a snake whose fangs have been pulled. Gather him in, that I may have the pleasure of watching him die. And do not forget that girl who ran to the rear of the junk. Someone is there with a gun. Swing men around to the stern, dividing, to take either side of the deck. There are but two, and one is helpless. Perhaps we may collect a fat ransom after all."

Men sprang forward to do his bidding. Ballinger shouting curses, the dirty water filling his mouth, causing his curses to become panic-stricken, sputtering grunts and cries for help, flailed his arms about in the water.

Men ran toward the stern of the boat. At the same moment, there were cries from the men on the junk which had been propelled toward the flag ship of the War Lord of Darkness.

Harder knew that the mysterious black sampan, filled with men dispatched to do the bidding of the War Lord of Darkness, had returned and was giving battle to the munitions junk.

"Can you swim?" he asked of Edith Minter as the half-naked men rushed along the stern of the junk.

"Like a fish," she said.

"Over with you," he told her. "Slip off your clothes. Swim over toward the shore. When you get where you can see the shore, float in the water. Listen for my instructions if I shout them to you. If you don't hear from me, swim to the shore. Under no circumstances come back unless I tell you to."

She hesitated.

"How about you?"

There was no time for argument. Jimmy Harder picked her up in his arms, tossed her overboard, flinging her over his shoulder into a clean dive, deftly.

He stepped forward, where the piled matting and cordage furnished some protection.

With the splash of the girl in the water, a cry arose from one of the men.

"She has jumped!"

"Swim after her!" shouted Yeah Jing Suhn.

It was not the manner in which Jimmy Harder wanted to die. He was, however, under no illusions as to the men with whom he was dealing. They were men who had no sense of compassion, no mercy, and they were like otters in the water.

Upon many occasions Jimmy Harder had speculated as to where he would be and what he would be doing when the grim executioner of death finally overtook him. He knew how little chance he

stood, standing up against these desperate, all but naked fighters inflamed with a fanatical hysteria. But he knew that unless he could create sufficient diversion to give Edith Minter a chance to escape, these men would be on her like sharks in the water.

Jimmy Harder stepped from his place of concealment in the shadows behind the rail and called in Chinese, "Stand back, you scum! I have business with your master!"

HE knew Chinese psychology, knew the benefit which could be expected from surprise, and knew also that principle of human psychology which is world-wide in its application, that all the animals including man, will attack that which runs, but that there is a tendency to stand in wary appraisal when an antagonist starts walking forward with the calm arrogance of conscious power.

Harder saw the man in the bright red jacket and the dark trousers step forth from the cabin. The dagger had been thrown, but the jade box, with its green poison, was still clutched in the claw-like hand with the stained, tapering fingernails.

The men fell back for a moment. Then a broadshouldered individual, naked from the waist up, his skin glistening in the light which poured out from the cabin door, lunged forward.

It was not the gun of Jimmy Harder that checked him; it was the voice of the War Lord of Darkness.

"Peace!" he said. "I have heard this voice before. Let us see. Ah! It is Jee Mah Wei, who posed as the silk merchant going to the monastery for penance, and, quite apparently, Jee Mah Wei is not Chinese at all, but is one of the white devil ghosts."

Harder continued to walk forward, the animals, including man, will attack him, he knew that the men closed in, forming a human wall between him and escape, but he knew also that he had diverted their attention from Edith Minter, who had been given an opportunity to make good her escape.

Other men dragged George Ballinger to the junk. They lifted his fat, dripping figure to the teakwood planks.

Yeah Jing Suhn surveyed both men in interested appraisal.

Harder still held the gun in his hand.

"Do you," said the man in the scarlet coat, "carry weapons when you visit?"

"Yes," said Harder.

The War Lord of Darkness rasped a command in Cantonese.

"Disarm him and search him."

Men lunged forward.

Jimmy Harder knew that he was close to death, knew, indeed, that it was eventually inevitable, but it needed only struggle to get a knife inserted immediately between his ribs. He had staked everything upon the element of surprise, and now he anticipated that which was to come by making a bow and extending the gun to the nearest man.

"And so," said the War Lord of Darkness, still with that sardonic note to his voice, that scornful gleam in his eyes, "you changed your mind and did not give thanks at the monastery after all."

"No," Harder explained. "Gods who are intelligent enough to help can read thanks in the heart and need not hear it from the lips."

The eyes flickered over him in contemplative appraisal.

"The disguise was rather good. I will admit that I was fooled," the Chinese leader said, speaking in drawling English which had a slight British accent. "And so Jee Mah Wei has become James Harder, the man who specializes upon intrigue in the Orient."

Jimmy Harder, smaller than either the fat Ballinger or the tall Chinese, stood with his feet planted wide apart, his head tilted slightly upward, his eyes blazing steadily into those of the tall Chinese.

"I do not specialize upon intrigue,"

he said. "I specialize upon a square deal. I seek a square deal for China. I seek peace instead of war."

"And you came up the river to block my effort," the tall man said almost casually.

"I came up river," Jimmy Harder said, "because Charles Belter disappeared in Canton. I came to learn what had happened to him. I came to probe other disappearances."

There was a humorous twinkle in the man's eyes.

"The trail in Canton," he said, "was getting rather hot, so I thought I would plant a clue that would lead further up river. I had no intimation that planting the clue in such an ingenious manner would bring you into the picture. Gentlemen, come in and sit down."

The man motioned to the interior of the lighted cabin.

Jimmy Harder preceded Ballinger through the door.

He heard the tall Chinese in the doorway say to his men in Cantonese, "You have dealt with a fox, and he has fooled you. While he walked toward you and you stood looking at him with open mouths, the girl went into the water. Take a sampan and find her. If you do not find her you will be punished."

The tall figure strode into the cabin.

Ballinger said, "Look here, you can't get away with this. I came up here in good faith. I delivered my stuff. If you're going to keep any kind of a credit, so far as munitions are concerned, you've got to give safe conduct to the people who sell those munitions. Otherwise, you'll find every munition company in the country will boycott you. You won't be able to get a single gun or a single cartridge."

The half-amused gaze of the Chinese flickered over in Ballinger's direction, then turned back to Jimmy Harder.

"I have heard much of you men," the Chinese said. "No, no, my dear Ballinger. Please. The door is guarded. A man waits with a knife poised, ready to strike if you should seek to leave without my permission.

"As I was saying, Harder, I have heard much of you. I have been particularly interested in what I have heard concerning the games of chess that you play. They tell me that you do not speak to each other, but that you enjoy combatting one another over the chess board. It is most interesting. I wonder if you have ever played for stakes—for high stakes."

"What are you getting at?" Harder inquired gruffly.

"I am wondering if you have ever played for stakes of life and death. I am wondering just how you would act if you were playing when your life hung in the balance. Come, gentlemen, you shall play chess with me—one at a time. If you lose the game, you lose your life. If you win the game, you will win your life. You will, of course, necessarily be held prisoners for awhile. You see, my operations are about ready to come to a head. It would be most inopportune to be discovered at this time.

"And do you know, my dear Ballinger, some of my secret agents reported that after you had delivered my munitions to me, you intended to approach the Municipal Government of Canton and explain to it the danger that threatened and sell them another consignment of munitions, so that they could be prepared for an attack.

"There was, of course, nothing to the rumor. It was merely one of those things which have no foundation in fact, but it simply shows what a dangerous thing gossip can be. And, in order to keep my men from being discontented, it would be necessary to hold you for a little while."

Ballinger's face showed startled consternation. He started to speak, but the long, tapering fingers, with the stained, pointed nails, were raised in a deprecatory gesture.

"No, no, I beg of you. Don't bother to contradict," said Yeah Jing Suhn.

"After all, it is only a minor matter. Come, we will play chess. Be seated, gentlemen. And you, my dear Mr. Harder, please don't keep in that tense attitude of listening. I know that you are trying to find out if my sampans have discovered the young woman who jumped into the water. I can assure you that if they do discover her, they will report to me immediately. And, in the meantime, we are losing valuable time. Come, let us get to our chess game. You will be first, my dear Mr. Harder."

Chuckling sardonically, the tall Chinese produced a chess board, set up men, indicated a stool.

"I give you the white color and the first move as a consequence," said Yeah Jing Suhn.

Harder sat down to the strangest chess game he had ever played in his life. His life was at stake, and, after the first five moves, he knew why the Chinese had been so casually ready to play for such stakes.

The man was a veritable master of chess, and he did not need to conform to the conventional openings, but departed almost immediately from the two-knight opening, to develop a form of attack which would have been suicidal in a less able player, but which speedily developed into such a baffling combination of unforeseen moves that Harder entered into a forced exchange and came out a piece the loser.

Ballinger watched the game with interested, frightened eyes. He knew well enough that they had both met their master.

"The conventional openings," the Chinese said, "become so dreary and monotonous. And, then again, the playing of a game becomes largely a matter of subconscious memory. Virtually every move combination has been experienced in one form or another in previous games. Now, for instance, with this form of attack—"

His voice trailed away into silence as he made an unexpected move, apparently laying himself wide open.

Harder sensed a trap. He stared intently at the man, suddenly realized that if he took advantage of that move he was doomed, and then realized, with a sickening certainty, that he had no other alternative but to launch a counter-attack at the particular point the Chinese had opened up.

He felt perspiration sliming his forehead, looked around him helplessly.

Suddenly his eyes caught the flicker of motion. Years of experience in dealing with the unexpected had taught him never to betray surprise. He did not move his eyes, but continued to stare at the walls of the room, as though seeking to concentrate his mind.

The room was lit by two peanut oil lamps. It was ventilated by a long narrow slit high up near the ceiling. A slender bamboo pole was slowly, slyly entering through one of the slits. It groped its way toward one of the peanut oil lamps.

"Come, come, my dear Mr. Harder, I'm afraid I shall have to insist on an immediate move. You have taken long enough. Your wits seem to be woolgathering. As a matter of fact, a man can solve any problem in chess by ten second's concentration. If he takes longer than that it is a sign that his mind is vacillating between the problem at hand and other matters."

Jimmy Harder moved.

With a gesture of triumphant satisfaction, the tall Chinese brought up another piece from an unexpected quarter, opening a line of attack from which there was no escape. Harder's retreat was cut off. Another move, and he would be in check. Three more, and he would be mated.

The bamboo pole moved swiftly. One of the peanut oil lamps smashed to the floor.

The tall Chinese whirled in his chair. The long bamboo pole whipped to the other side of the cabin, groped uncer-

tainly for a moment, and then the second lamp crashed to the floor.

The room was plunged into inky darkness.

HARDER paused not. He lunged forward. The chess board crashed to the floor. The chess men rolled about on the hardwood. Harder caught the arm of the tall Chinese. He heard an exclamation of surprised rage, felt the haft of a knife in the man's hand as Harder's wrist slid down the silk-clad arm.

The cabin door opened and closed.

The tall Chinese thrust viciously with the knife. Harder jumped back, swung his left in a long circling punch, holding his right ready to crash home a straight from the shoulder follow-up.

There was a mocking laugh in the darkness. His circling fist whizzed through empty atmosphere.

Harder crouched close to the floor, groped forward, heard abruptly the sounds of swift struggle, the noise that might have been made by a plunging knife. Then a heavy body thudded to the teakwood planks.

The darkness echoed with a chuckle and the voice of Mow Jie, speaking in Cantonese, said, "Come my master, the way is open."

Harder groped toward the sound of the voice, felt the fingers of the Cat Man on his arm. He was guided toward the door. The breath of night air which came through the opening struck him full in the face.

"Quick!" Mow Jie said. "The sampan at the side—covered with black cloth!"

Harder sprinted across the dark deck, saw a black blotch at the side, plunged into the sampan, crawled under the cloth. A moment later he felt the small craft bob about on the water as Mow Jie jumped to the stern. Then he heard the rhythmic sweep of the scull as the sampan moved away.

"We must find the woman," Harder cautioned from beneath the cloth. "Move toward the shore. There will be other sampans searching. I will call her name when we get near the shore."

Mow Jie said nothing. Harder heard the swish of the scull in the water, heard a sudden cry from the junk, then saw the flash of lights.

After a few moments the voice of Mow Jie said, "We are near the shore, Master."

Harder emerged from under the black cloth, raised his voice, shouted, "Oh, Edith. Hello, Edith!"

There was no response.

Harder stared back in the direction of the junk. He could see the other junk which contained the munitions of war that Ballinger had agreed to deliver, could see the junk of the War Lord of Darkness, on which lights were now flitting busily about. He heard the sounds of struggle, the thud of blows, then an agonized cry which apparently came from the lips of Ballinger.

Harder said to Mow Jie, "We need light. Scull toward the junk—the one with the contraband aboard."

"Toward the junk, First Born?" asked Mow Jie.

"Yes."

Mow Jie wasted no time. He swung the sampan in a circle.

"The black cloth will conceal us," Harder said. "We have work to do."

His voice was grim and purposeful.

The sampan slid smoothly over the water. Harder, keeping his voice low, said, "What happened to you, Mow Jie? I thought you were dead."

"The man," said Mow Jie, "sees in the dark as well as I. He took me by surprise. I thought he was one of the crew. Before I knew what had happened they had me in the sampan, but I did not stay long. I went overboard, and as I went I left with those evil ones a memento of my visit. There is blood upon the deck of that sampan, First Born—blood which shows them they are

not to trifle with Mow Jie, the Cat Man. And you? How did you get here?"

"I came back," said Harder.

Mow Jie's voice was tender.

"To look for your servant," he said. "Ai-i-i-i! Ah-h-h-h! But you should have been Chinese!"

The munitions junk loomed above them.

"In close," Harder said. "Tie the sampan and up we go."

They gained the deck of the junk. Upon the forward part, men were standing about, awaiting instructions. There was a dispute between the boatmen as to whether the junk should be unloaded and the cargo transferred, or whether it should be taken back to Canton with the cargo intact.

Mow Jie's unerring feet led the way. He knew, without the necessity of words to tell him, the plan that Harder had in mind.

The two men, moving as silent shadows, slipped into the deserted living quarters of the junk. They brought out a large can of peanut oil. It was but the work of a moment to drop down into the hold of the junk, where boxes and barrels were stacked in rows. The peanut oil splashed to the wood. Boards from a smashed case made kindling. A match sputtered.

The two men turned and raced for the deck. Behind them was a flare of light, the crackle of flames. Black smoke began to roll upward through the hatch.

Two Chinese in the front of the junk turned to run back toward the two men. The flames roared into red, angry brilliance. Someone shouted a warning. The men fell back.

Mow Jie and Harder went over the side into the sampan, pushed away from the junk.

Behind them, came a rattle as a case of cartridges suddenly popped like firecrackers. Then there was a terrific roar. Flames shot up into the heavens. White smoke puffed out over the junk like a mushroom, then drifted upward, giving way to black smoke, which rolled up in clouds. Small explosions made a continuous rattle.

Mow Jie sculled the sampan desperately.

"Toward the shore," called Harder.

There were other sampans which had been cruising about, but they turned and raced back toward the flaming junk as they saw the spreading flames.

Harder stood up in the bow of the sampan.

Someone shot at him. The bullet whizzed past his head. He continued to stand there, peering out into the darkness. Again there was the sound of a shot; the bullet thudded into the wood of the sampan.

Harder stood there like a statue.

Near the shore a figure waved at him. The voice of Edith Minter called, "Here!"

Mow Jie sent the sampan darting toward the bank.

There was a third shot. A deadly breath of cold wind whispered across Harder's face. Suddenly behind him the sky seemed to blossom into red light. There was a roar which pushed out a wall of air as though it were a giant invisible fist, knocking Harder down to the deck of the sampan.

He saw burning brands rising high in the night air, heard the hiss of water turning to steam as it came in contact with flame. Then, after a moment, he heard the humming noise made by fragments of wreckage hurtling down from the upper heavens. There were myriad flashes.

Mow Jie continued to scull the boat steadily, never missing a stroke.

Edith Minter waded out to meet them. Harder lifted her into the sampan.

"To Canton," said Mow Jie, with his strange dry chuckle as he turned the bow of the light craft.

"No," Harder said in English, staring back toward the place where the water was littered with smoking wreckage.

"The leader is dead. The munitions are destroyed. Our work is over. But there is one thing we must do. I can't lose Ballinger. They'll kill him unless we rescue him."

Edith Minter's tone showed her surprise.

"I thought you were sworn enemies," she said.

Harder's tone was grim.

"Make no mistake," he said, "I hate his guts. But he plays a remarkable game of chess, and I've just found out that I need to improve mine."

Mow Jie, ever keen for a fight, pulled a knife from his sash, inspected the stained point.

"It is," he said, "covered with Look Took Yok, the green poison."

He sculled the boat with swift rapidity, holding the knife in his right hand. In the bow of the sampan, Harder crouched, ready to spring.

Darkness had once more descended upon the waters. The remaining junk showed only as a black outline against the sky. The air was filled with the acrid fumes of burnt powder, with the odor of charred wood to which water had been applied.

Mow Jie gave his peculiar dry chuckle.

"The leader is dead," he said, "the munitions of war are destroyed. It is dark. There will be no difficulty. It is time for the cat to walk a fence."

THERE were three school teachers from the States, a missionary, a clerk from the consular office, and the buyer for a British importing house on the river steamer which pulled out from Canton to Hongkong.

The little group gathered around a table, where two men sat in silent hostility, playing chess, exchanging never a word.

Back of the group, Sidney Minter, his arm around his sister's waist, watched the men with horrified fascination.

Jimmy Harder suddenly abandoned the conventional two-knights opening, flung out his queen in what was apparently an unprotected spot.

The spectators, trying to fathom the peculiar strategy, saw the fat man push back his chair, stare with wide, horrified eyes at the chess board.

"No, Jimmy! Not that move. Not that one. For God's sake, no! That's the one HE used."

It was the first time Ballinger had spoken to Jimmy Harder in five years.

Your next feature novel brings back to the fold after a long absence one of ADVENTURE'S favorite writers —Georges Surdez, who gives us a novel of the Foreign Legion which has all the color and glamor and authenticity characteristic of his work, and is also about the most thrilling tale of battle action in the Atlas you've ever read. Watch for the Legionnaire on the August ADVENTURE cover!

HELL SHIP

By DONALD MACKENZIE

A Yarn of the Ocean Tramps—and Vengeance on the High Seas

THE golden glow of morning lay soft over Capri and Naples as Chief Mate Irish Gowan mounted eagerly to the bridge of the ocean tramp *Teecoomeh.*

Sourly, Captain Baldwin thrust a crumpled wireless message towards him.

"From your friend the Fleet Captain at Genoa."

"It's no, I suppose," Gowan grunted.

"It's yes," Captain Baldwin snorted, "and be damned to you! Like enough Lars Oelstrom will knock your stubborn Irish head off your shoulders." He paused. "Listen to me, Irish," he pleaded, laying a hand on the shoulder of his husky young mate. "Send a message to the Genoa office saying you changed your mind."

"I asked for the shift and I'll transfer to Oelstrom's ship when we dock at Naples today," Gowan said stubbornly. "I've waited five years for this chance, sir. As for Oelstrom knocking my head off, he's welcome to try ten times every day."

"Ah!" Baldwin spat. "You're like all the micks—choked up to the ears with sentiment."

"That's right," Gowan agreed soberly. "I was bo's'n in Oelstrom's ship five years ago and the greenhorn, Ellsworth, got under my skin. He was a fine clean cut lad, sir, with a good heart and plenty of courage. He did me a good turn with a rope's end. I was by way being fish bait due to a cross sea that popped me."

"Remarkable," Baldwin said with dry sarcasm. "It's the most remarkable story of rescue I ever heard about."

"Rub it in if you like," Gowan went on grimly. "I saw Oelstrom's boot

knock that kid's face in." His big freckled fist knotted on the rail. "Next day, I say, I saw the boy lying dead in the swill and muck of the Tunis waterfront. 'Twas Oelstrom laid him out," he said in a voice harsh with bitterness, "and he's been laughing up his sleeve ever since."

"You're a damn fool," Baldwin growled. "Oelstrom will laugh in your face."

"So he will." Gowan nodded. "Also, he will own up that he busted young Ellsworth with a spike, or something, before he pitched him overside to die on the fender log."

Baldwin spat disgustedly to leeward.

"You are leaving me for a mate's berth in Lars Oelstrom's hell ship, because a greenhorn got his head stove in five years ago. Pah! You make me sick."

"I tell you the boy hauled me out of the sea in midwinter," Gowan protested, "and I'm going to prove he got a dirty deal from Lars Oelstrom."

"And what good will that do you?"

"I'll square the boy—according to the law or with my own two hands."

"Bilge," said Baldwin.

"By God, sir," Gowan retorted vehemently, "you yourself would be the last to see dirt done an innocent without lifting a finger."

"Go on down and pack your duds," Baldwin commanded gruffly. "Listen here," he growled in a nasty voice as Gowan turned to go, "if that baboon Oelstrom does you dirt I'll hound him off the sea. Tell him that's a promise from Maxey Baldwin."

"By God, sir—" Gowan began.

"Lay aft, Mr. Gowan," Baldwin cracked coldly. "And don't let me see you on the bridge of my ship again without a hat."

When, before noon, the ship tied up, Gowan went ashore.

"Come back when Oelstrom has knocked some of the hell out of you," Baldwin grinned wryly, as Gowan went down to the dock.

"Anyway, I'll be back," Gowan retorted.

He swung his duffle bag across one sturdy shoulder and with a brief farewell gesture stalked through the clang and clatter and the variegated sights and smells of Naple's waterfront toward the S. S. *Wasp.*

Beside the rusty reach of her high side he settled his cap tightly on his red head and gazed about.

June morning in the Bay of Naples was blue and gold and splendid. The air was wine. The sea sparkled. Capri was a happy dream. Even Vesuvius seemed to laze pushing her sinister plume among the snowy mares tails whisking down the sky.

Irish sighed.

"Ah, well," he murmured, "God in his wisdom—'tis a fine day for it anyway."

AT THE top of the dock ladder Gowan paused to take in the clutter of hatch covers, ropes, canvas, and strong backs heaped helterskelter about the *Wasp's* after well deck. A sallow, hatchet-faced young officer, with a tobacco quid bulging his unshaven jaw, threw aside the rope's end he was splicing and turned a watery-eyed and malignant glance towards the newcomer.

At once the officer's narrow face split into a snagtoothed grin and he crossed the deck. Gowan swung his duffle bag inboard and dropped lightly beside it.

"Where's Oelstrom?" he said, planting himself before the officer whose grin wavered at Gowan's blunt approach.

"You're Gowan, the mate," the officer said eagerly. "Captain Oelstrom is expecting you. I'm Penzel, second officer."

"Are you?" said Gowan drily. "By the looks of this deck you're in charge of, you might be the junkman."

"I knew you right away," Penzel said beaming. "I seen your pictures but I never saw you fight. I hear you are champ of the merchant fleets."

"Wind," said Gowan, watching Penzel's flabbly grin almost but not wholly

conceal the ratty malevolence of his eyes. "I'll go forward," he said tersely. "Quarters in the main deck house I suppose?"

"Sure, go right ahead." Penzel oozed hospitality.

"The spider and the fly," Gowan thought cynically as he sought his quarters.

A man came in while Gowan stowed his scant belongings.

"I'm Stack," he said appearing soundlessly in the doorway behind Gowan.

"Is that so," Gowan replied tartly. "By the way you slide around making no noise you might be a phantom. What do you want?"

Stack's saturnine face lightened with a faint ironic smile.

"What do *you* want?" he countered. "I'm third officer aboard and I came to get acquainted; to give you the lay-out of the ship—if you want it."

"I'll tell you one thing," Gowan said significantly. "If you come slipping up behind me again I'll lay you out as a warning to any other softshoe artists who might be aboard."

"That's okay with me," Stack chuckled. "I noticed you didn't exactly take a shine to Mr. Penzel."

"So you saw that?"

"I saw it, and let me tell you the Old Man will bring it up. Another nail in your coffin."

"So you think," Gowan said grimly. "Where's Oelstrom now?"

"In his cabin with blood in his eye and murder in his heart. Penzel is his playmate."

"And his chief mate," Gowan snorted, "but for me coming aboard. What's become of the mate you shipped leaving New York?"

"Two days from Odessa he had trouble with Captain Oelstrom." Stack's smoky eyes gleamed wickedly. "He missed the ship at Istanbul."

"Oelstrom don't change any." Gowan waggled his head sadly. "The lad got a slugging, likely, in some dark alley."

"I wouldn't be suprised," Stack said quietly. "Oelstrom has pulled that trick before."

"Has he?" said Gowan looking up.

"He did a job on a greenhorn once at Tunis." Stack's pause was heavy with meaning. "I guess you've heard about that?"

Gowan studied the man. Back in Stack's smoky eyes a gleam had come, and into his calm and slightly mocking voice a note of bitterness.

"Funny you should bring that up," Gowan said slowly. "The young man fell—so the investigation reported—fell between the ship and the dock; and broke his head on the fender log."

"Yes, he did," Stack snickered scornfully. "You'll be telling me next that a dark night and the edge of a door raised that bulge over Oelstrom's eye."

"Maybe it did," Gowan growled. "Mind your own business, Stack, and you won't be caught between Oelstrom and me when fists are flying."

"Let me figure what's my business," Stack said icily. "You're poison to Oelstrom and you know it. He's poison to me. We're in the pot together and the heat is about to go on. Penzel will trim the fires, Mr. Gowan, and do the stirring." He paused, eyeing Gowan ironically. "I'll take care of my business as I see it. It wouldn't be the first time two people found that their business overlapped."

"What's the meaning of that last crack?"

"You'll find out maybe," Stack said, still calm. "If I were a religious man I'd say your coming here was an act of God."

"You'd better not be flip about God or speak in riddles either. Talk sense or shove off," Gowan growled sourly.

"I'll shove off," Stack agreed. "What I came down to tell you is this. The Old Man threw a fit when he heard you were being ordered aboard. Says he'll see you when we are clear of the coast. On the high seas, to you, where Captain

Oelstrom is lord of the world." Stack laughed bitterly. "He'll try you at catch weights, Gowan, no holds barred and mayhem a lavender dream."

"I'll face that when I come to it," Gowan retorted. "Meantime, if I were you I'd stow the gab about Tunis. That was five years ago. The boy is dead. And if Lars Oelstrom bumped his eye on a dark night that's his affair. There's always a chance, Stack, that somebody might think you were the one that stirred the pot."

EIGHT bells had gone. The Wasp rode easily in a swelling sea and laid a smoke film flat to the starlit water. The captain's door in the wheelhouse swung open and Lars Oelstrom filled the opening. A dim glow from the binnacle threw his cruel heavy face into sharp relief. Light streaming from the room behind brought out the rolling curves of his immense body. Stooping slightly, to clear the door top, his hammy fists swung almost to his knee joints. From a little distance, hairy and uncouth, he resembled a great ape staring with little red-rimmed black eyes beyond the glassed-in front of the wheelhouse.

Then he spoke. His voice was a harsh rumble rasping across the stillness like the grind of rock on rock.

"Where's Gowan?"

"Right here," said Gowan, stepping in from the quarter deck. Stack stepped in behind him.

"What're yuh doin'," Oelstrom said truculently, "comparin' notes with that crepehanger?"

"Turning the brige over," Gowan said. "Eight bells just went."

"You don't have to tell me what time it is. Come in here. I want to talk to you."

Inside Oelstrom spread himself in a broad-seated chair that flanked one side of a heavy table bolted to the deck.

"Sit down there," he rasped, waving a hairy fist to a chair opposite. Above their heads a single yellow light burned dim, then brightened and shed a murky yellow glow about them.

"What the hell do you mean by hazing Mr. Penzel the minute you land in my ship," he said, eyeing Gowan balefully.

"Since when have second mates been so soft?" Gowan countered. "I heard you ran a hell ship, Oelstrom."

"Stop your jaw, Gowan," Oelstrom rumbled. "I got no use for you and you know it. And while you're in my ship you treat Mr. Penzel civil. He's a better mate than you are."

"I shed my diapers long ago," Gowan said scornfully. "A punk like Penzel can't take me in."

"No merchant fleet pug can come aboard of my ship stirring up trouble and get away with it. I'll break your red neck myself, see?" Oelstrom roared.

"All right," said Gowan shortly, "if that is what you had me in to say, it's said, so I'll be going."

"I ain't through talkin' with you. Who the hell do you think you are? I'm master here, so sit your carcass where it is until I tell you to move it. Have a drink," he said shoving a bottle of arrack across the table.

"No, thanks," Gowan smiled, "I take only beer and very little of that."

"A drink for women," Oelstrom snorted. "I wouldn't think Fighting Irish Gowan would bother with it. It's all froth and yellow coloring. But maybe you're like that?"

"Maybe Mr. Penzel thought I was, but he changed his mind," Gowan said acidly.

Oelstrom downed a slug of the fiery stuff and glared.

"Hah!" He spat violently. "You and your micks' blather. I'd squeeze you dry and let the wind carry you off. Penzel's no match for you. He's soft. But I'm tough, see?"

"That's right," Gowan said with a disarming smile, "and you like your likker straight and plenty of it. Well, it's

too tough a system for me to follow."

"None of your dirty cracks, Gowan. You raised a shanty on my eye durin' that little shore-goin' mutiny you fixed at Tunis. That don't mean you could lick me even if you were tough."

"That's ancient history. I took a drubbing myself that night."

"And you'll take a worse one if you get rough in my ship. Irish Gowan," Oelstrom jeered, "lost his head about a deck swab who got drunk and slammed the master's shins with a chipping hammer and then said it slipped."

"The boy was sober. The hammer did slip. A simple enough thing. You know that as well as I do."

"But he got the toe of my boot where it didn't do his face any good, didn't he? Ha-ha! And he squalled—squalled like a five-year-old."

Under the lash of Oelstrom's gloating laughter Gowan again saw the boy. Fair, tall, and twenty, he cried his grief for the silly accident while he held his battered face in both hands and blood, oozing between his fingers, dripped—*pip—pip—pip*—to the deck.

"All right," said Gowan corking his fury. "So what?"

"Y'got some of the boys to waylay Lars Oelstrom ashore, didn't you? And you yourself poked him one in the eye. But what happened to the swab, hey?" Oelstrom's eyes glittered balefully at Gowan.

"You tell," said Gowan in a still voice. "Why don't you spill it?"

"Sure, I'll spill it. He fell off the gangway. He broke his head on the fender log."

"I heard about that," Gowan said, edging his voice with sarcasm.

"So what do you think happened?" Oelstrom's jaw shot forward, and he laid one huge paw on the table before Gowan.

"A clean kid laid up in bed with his face stove in," Gowan said soberly. "Who saw him walk out? How was it he lay sixteen feet from the gangway? Maybe he was walking the bulwark for fun, eh, Captain? Drunks do funny things sometimes."

Oelstrom's little eyes darted to and fro. Fear and guilt and mounting animal rage shot the narrow whites of them with blood.

"What're y'trying to say?" he snarled. "Spit it out! Or are you too yellow to say what's on your mind? Maybe that's it?"

"The boy is dead," Gowan said steadily. "It's old stuff. Rehashing it is no good."

"Hunting a hole are you?" Oelstrom sneered. "Well, I want it rehashed, see? You can't get away with wise-crackin' me anymore than you can get away with that poke in the eye y'handed me. Something is comin' to you, Mr. Irish Gowan."

"So that's the game!" Gowan smiled bitterly. "The man with blood on his hands and the man who can see it there. What will it be, Oelstrom? More blood? Why don't you plug me with a gun?" Gowan leaned forward and his face was tight with passion. "Who killed the kid Ellsworth at Tunis?" he snapped. "Who chucked him over the side? Who cracked his head beforehand? Who do you think, Oelstrom? Who came aboard at nine-thirty that night? Who sent the Arab watchman forward?" His glittering eyes narrowed, and his finger shot forward, pinning the crime on Oelstrom. "*Who?*" he spat. "Why *you* did, you bloody pirate!"

Oelstrom straightened. Gray with the rage that convulsed his face and brought pink froth to his lips, he arose with a speed uncanny in one of his bulk.

Gowan came up with him but was unprepared for Oelstrom's ruse.

With a lunge of his great body Oelstrom swept the heavy table, which ordinarily was bolted down, backward, pinning Gowan to the wall. His clubbed right fist, armored in iron knuckle-dusters, swung up and crashed like an oaken club against Gowan's head.

"Aye," he snarled. "I broke his fool

head and I'll break yours, too."

Again and again his great arm and its armored extremity broke the feeble guard which Gowan, hampered by the bulkhead and the slab of table driven against his chest, was able to raise. At the third crushing impact, bloody and unconscious, he sank down.

Oelstrom flung the table aside. He licked his lips and gloated over Gowan's slack body. Then deliberately he swung his booted foot back and kicked.

In the murky yellow light of the overhead bulb his boot swung to and fro. The light fading dim, then shining hard and bright, kept somber time to the rhythmic swing of Oelstrom's shod foot that drew back, paused, then swept forward and jumped the bloody bundle against the bulkhead. Somewhere a cheap clock noisily galloped the seconds away.

Oelstrom was absorbed in his game. To and fro, to and fro, his foot moved like a pendulum. The clock galloped The yellow light ebbed and flowed. And Gowan bumped the bulkhead loosely.

Then Stack came, easing in by the quarter deck door. He passed unseen and unheard, across Oelstrom's bedroom to the torture chamber where Oelstrom punished his victim.

Stack's face was bleak and stiff with purpose. Silently he slipped behind Oelstrom and smacked the shotted sack of a persuader across the base of his head.

Oelstrom's foot stopped in mid-flight. His fingers flexed spasmodically once—twice. Like a tree in the wind his towering bulk swayed from side to side, then pitched over with a crash that shook the plates.

STACK snatched something from the floor; then, quickly locking all the doors but one, stepped out on deck. He had barely time to reach the wheelhouse when Penzel came bounding up the ladder.

"What's wrong with the Old Man?" he cried.

"Well," said Stack flippantly, "sometimes I think he's nuts—but maybe he's just bilious."

"Cut the comedy, Stack. Something is wrong in there."

"I'm on watch," Stack said indifferently. "I'm supposed to navigate the ship, not to wet-nurse Oelstrom."

"Oelstrom will wet-nurse you, you damned undertaker!" Penzel cried viciously.

"Just so you don't try it," Stack said coldly. "It would be too bad for you. Why don't you go in and look? Maybe baby fell out of his crib."

Stack followed into the cabin.

"Well," he drawled. "Looks like the two greatest gladiators afloat done wiped each other out."

"Stow the gab. Get a hold of Oelstrom's feet."

Stack slouched indifferently against the door frame.

"Why him? Why not Gowan? Oelstrom looks so peaceful. The sock that laid him out must have been a honey."

"Shut up and lay hold of his feet."

With some difficulty they heaved Oelstrom into his bunk.

"Now Gowan," said Stack.

Penzel sneered.

"Let the louse lay," he said bitterly.

For answer Stack flung the wheelhouse door wide and whistled the look-out in from the fo'c's'le head.

"Take Mr. Gowan below," he told the look-out and the wheelsman he relieved. "Lock him into his room and bring me the key."

Penzel scowled but did not dare the invitation in Stack's smoky eyes.

GOWAN awoke to find Stack leaning over him and his body a brimming vessel of pain.

"What time is it?" he said weakly.

"Just past midnight."

"He slugged me with knuckle dusters."

"Yeah. I found them on the floor. Thought you might like to use them sometime."

"You? What were you doing in there?"

"Massaging Captain Oelstrom's skull with a persuader. He went down like a pole-axed steer."

Gowan struggled painfully until he sat erect.

"What's the idea, Stack. What's your game anyhow?"

"Overlapping business," Stack said shortly. "Here, down this shot of rye and cork off. You got a watch to stand at four o'clock. You'll stand your watch, I suppose?"

"Give me the drink," said Gowan. "I'll line you up later. You're a queer customer, Stack."

"Pipe down now. I'll lock the door so visitors won't disurb you."

"Oelstrom will kill you if he finds out you slugged him. Have you thought of that."

"Oelstrom won't tackle me," Stack chuckled grimly. "Maybe you don't know it, Gowan, but there is one thing the master of this ship can't face."

"What's that?"

"This!" Stack's hand flashed from his pocket, and a cruel bladed Spanish clasp knife snicked open in it. "This is one Spanish cutey Oelstrom knows, and let's be."

"It's a fine ship," Gowan sighed, "well found with lethal weapons and men lusting for blood."

Stack laughed drily.

"Cork off now, Gowan. I'll call you myself when eight bells is due."

FOUR days from Seville, fourteen days from the day Gowan was beaten, the *Wasp* ran into a heavy sea fog. It climaxed a siege of petty storms, squalls, and brief periods of hot calm.

Gowan mended. The wracking pain of his bruises left him. The old spring came back and he was fit again.

Oelstrom didn't like it. Day by day he sourly watched Gowan's health improve and, one time, was set to retard the improvement; but the keen point of a Spanish knife at his back discouraged him. The glittering curved blade lay between him and Stack's ironic smile.

Penzel whispered with Oelstrom in the privacy of the captain's room and watched Gowan with the baleful indifference of a beast stalking its prey.

Then the fog came. Pea green and soupy it lay over ship and sea, a vast dripping canopy.

On the bridge of the *Wasp* all hands stood by. At four bells of the noon midwatch Oelstrom went into his room and Gowan, serving an impulse, bowed over the chart table to check the noon position. At intervals the whistle shrieked, rending the air to fragments.

With the figures checked Gowan shoved his work sheets back and swung toward the chart room door. Oelstrom was stepping in and Gowan bumped him, hard. Oelstrom roared an oath and struck, but Gowan was aside and his right fist raked Oelstrom's jaw. Then Gowan sprang through the chart room to the starboard quarterdeck. He slipped nimbly over the rail and dropped to the main deck below. Oelstrom thundered and cursed down the ladder to intercept him.

Between the coaming or number three hatch and the demountable chain rail which guarded the starboard side main deck of the ship, Gowan waited.

"Come and get it you bloody murderer!" he grated.

"Aye," Oelstrom growled, squaring off. "A master can't be blamed for putting a mutinous officer out. Did y'think of that, you fool."

"Step up," Gowan taunted him. "Bring your yellow sea-lawyer's carcass into the open."

Oelstrom rushed and Gowan, flinging himself at the captain's legs, crashed him to the rivet studded deck plates and

sprang free flaying his opponent with bitter comment.

"Get up. Get out your brass knuckles. Up, you filthy bilge rat, and fight!"

With his head out-thrust and his eyes afire, Oelstrom squared away, swinging his long prehensile arms and licking away the pink foam that flecked his mouth. Like a great ape he thumped his chest and rushed.

Gowan dodged and caught him, as he turned, with a fast slam that warped his nose and splashed his shirt and the deck with blood. Grunting and snuffling like an immense wart hog, Oelstrom pawed his broken nose.

The bo's'n and half the deck crew crowded the alley openings amidships. Some even dared a faint word of cheer for Gowan. Fireman and oilers, off watch, pushed forward, craning their necks to see. This was a thing their routine-cursed lives seldom experienced. A meeting of giants on the main deck of their tincan freighter.

One, the popular seagoing master of swat, clean cut, red-headed, compact as twisted wire, represented the best of the fighting strain in all of them. The other, beetle browed, brutal, and cruel, was the master of jungle tactics. A man who by repute and example had blood on his hands; a skulker who struck from the dark; a rotten bully hiding behind gold braid and the tradition of shipmasters at sea.

Gowan's blow hurt him. He snuffled and blew trying to clear the choking deluge that balanced scales with his smaller opponent.

Gowan timed Oelstrom's pawing hands and heaped in to belt his nose again.

With a roar of pain Oelstrom was after him. Gowan danced and dodged striking from all directions and getting away. Oelstrom bored in. To get Gowan into his enormous hands was the game. Get him and hold him until the immense weight of Oelstrom's body, the impact of driven knees, the crushing force of his immense arms, could be brought to bear. To crush, break and ruin.

The best he got in the first minute's exchange was a fragment of Gowan's shirt and a thin slick of blood when his raking hands tore the flesh of Gowan's shoulder.

Around and around they circled, Oelstrom snuffling and spitting, Gowan with the smooth grace of a panther; while the fog swirled and the whistle shrieked and the faces of the popeyed crew hung, a distorted cluster of masks, in the murk of the alley opening.

Then Gowan sprang in and a sweeping blow of Oelstrom's fist knocked him ten feet against the steel of the deck house. He bounded back, feinted, and pumped a hard blow to Oelstrom's already puffy eyes.

Oelstrom caught him.

An audible hiss of despair came from the watchers.

Oelstrom bellowed, gathering Gowan in. Half enfolded, Gowan twisted, dropped his full weight on Oelstrom's arms, and swung his feet out and up. Oelstrom's grip slipped. Overbalanced he came down a sprawl with Gowan beneath him. Three times his great paw slammed the deck, missing Gowan's head by a breath, and then Gowan worked his legs free and with a twisting upswing spun out of Oelstrom's grasp. Again he whipped his knotty fists to Oelstrom's eyes and went down under Oelstrom's lunging half tackle.

Oelstrom twisted Gowan's leg, straining to wrench the knee, and Gowan battered Oelstrom's great head with swinging rights and lefts that would have stunned an ordinary man. Swiftly then he half rolled until Oelstrom's face came up and banged the brused nose again. Oelstrom's grip eased an instant and one of Gowan's legs wrenched free. His foot swung down crushing Oelstrom's face against the deck. Gowan was free again.

Dirt and blood smeared Oelstrom's face in a gory paste. His eyes, never large, were hidden in folds of puffy blue

flesh. He looked like a man who had met a railroad train head on.

But his strength and the inhuman rage that bubbled and snarled in his throat were unimpared. A full second the two men stood clear. Then Gowan flashed in, stopped, and as Oelstrom tried for him, swerved aside and crossed an overhanded left into his battered face. Oelstrom swung around as if on a pivot and his sweeping fingers, catching Gowan's clothes, spun him, stumbling off balance, under the lee of the quarter deck where the hatch coaming and house made a corner. With his back to the chain rail Oelstrom faced him and moved slowly in. Gowan tensed, waiting. All eyes were on the men.

Suddenly a shadow fell over Gowan and he was enfolded in a canvas flung from the quarter deck above his head.

Oelstrom charged with triumph roaring in his throat. Still fighting to free himself of the canvas, Gowan somehow avoided the rush. Oelstrom swung around and charged again while Gowan, fighting the big tarpaulin, backed blindly toward the rail.

Stack sprang forward close by the chain rail. His shout of warning was already out as, grasping one of the demountable rail stanchions with one hand, he stretched the other to push Gowan clear when Oelstrom struck. Charging low, Oelstrom knocked the entangled Gowan over and, fouled by the billowing canvas, stumbled, and pitched through the rail into the fog laden sea.

Nobody spoke. Through the space of a deeply drawn breath all hands were shocked rigid.

Then Stack jumped.

"Man over—port wheel—*hard!*" he yelled.

The whistle shrieked its alarm.

Stooping, Stack caught the edge of Gowan's shroud and spun him rolling on deck.

"Bo's'n get a boat over. Jump!"

Gowan bounced up as the men streamed for the boat deck ladders.

A bare instant he stared confusedly, then stepped up to Stack and caught his arm.

"Listen to me, Mister," he snapped harshly. "Tell Penzel he'll command a boat. You take another. Give the bo's'n one too. I'll circle here and blow so you'll know where I am. Get to it, man!"

Already one boat was swung out.

Penzel scuttled across the deck. Gowan swung him around.

"Find him, you scum," he snarled. "You put him over, now get him back. I ain't done with him, see?"

Aloft the wireless crackled the news. In fifteen minutes ships for miles around knew that Lars Oelstrom was in the sea —somewhere.

Heaving life rings and burning flares into the murk, Gowan worked the ship in a wide circle. Circling and twisting, with his whistle warning all within hearing of his search and position, he cut over a square mile of the sea's surface. It was blind work, but he kept at it until long after dark.

At the end of eight hours of heartbreaking labor and suspense no trace of Lars Oelstrom was found. Regretfully then, Gowan recalled the boats. Within the hour three crews of weary men climbed heavily up the Jacob's ladder to the deck.

The main office at Genoa got a terse message.

"Oelstrom, master, lost overboard in fog. Gowan now commanding. Details later."

Alone in the chartroom Gowan spread the ship's log before him and entered starkly, in the way of seamen, an obituary. The whole entry occupied a scant two lines. Then he closed the book and with his hands spread wide upon it murmured—

"And may God pity the black soul of ye."

About the after deck the crew huddled in groups talking in low voices. Now and then somebody laughed. There was a strange note of relief in the sound.

THE SURGING light from the overhead bulb lay yellow and fitful over the furniture in Oelstrom's cabin and marked the battered features of Irish Gowan with thick smudgy shadows.

"You're a rat, Penzel," he was saying, "I wouldn't have you for a deck swab in a garbage scow. So you'll stay off the bridge. And don't forget there's a full crew in this ship would like a crack at you for that tarpaulin trick. Beyond that I'd like about three minutes alone with you myself—and I'll get it the first time you step out of line. Get below now and stay there."

Watery-eyed and broken, Penzel went out and down and the men he passed watched him with hard eyes and promised themselves a night ashore.

"It's a strange thing, Mr. Stack," Gowan said when Penzel had gone, "that one of the stanchions holding the chain rail was free of its socket when Oelstrom went over the side."

"Maybe his weight struck it loose," Stack said reasonably.

"Yeah? It seems I remember a wise crack you made about Oelstrom walking into a door at night."

"Oh, yes," said Stack. "Well, what's the answer?"

"I'm asking you. You were the only man near the rail at the time."

"Strange things happen," Stack said solemnly. "There was, for instance, the case of a youngster who died in the dockside scum of Tunis. Nobody was responsible. An act of God they called it."

"What the hell has that to do with the loose rail stanchion?"

"The boy's name was Ellsworth," Stack went on in a somber voice. "Do you remember, Gowan? You ought to, he counted you his friend. Ellsworth was the name he signed under. His real name was Stack. Ellsworth Stack."

"Good God, man . . . !"

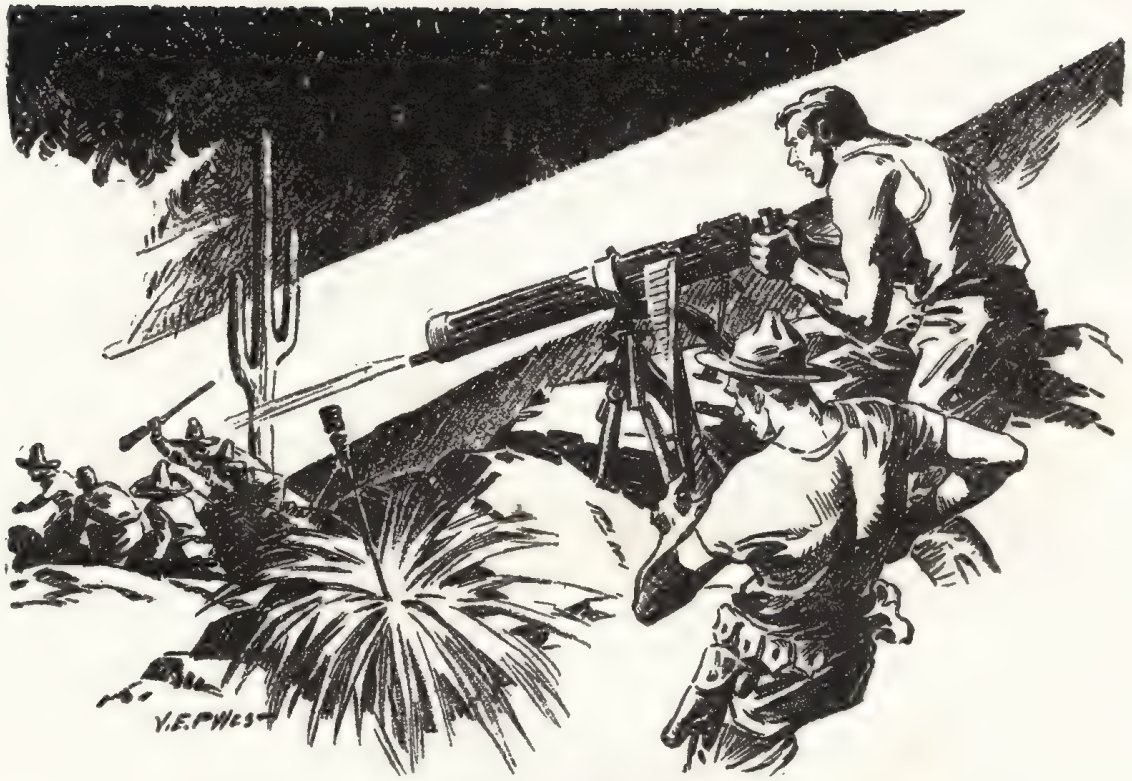
"My kid brother. Yes! He was smashed like a cockroach under the heel of Lars Oelstrom."

Through long minutes tragedy lay stark between them and the overhead bulb ebbed and flowed, splotching them with murky light. Outside the sea hissed and whispered. Its voice peopled the cabin with ghosts. Shadows played in the corners. Somewhere a crazy clock galloped the seconds away.

At last Gowan stirred. No muscle moved in Stack's face. His smoky eyes alone wavered with infinite resignation to Gowan's.

"Aye," said Gowan softly. "An act of God. Belike 'tis His hand. I'd not be the one to deny it."

Donald Mackenzie, a newcomer, and in our opinion a discovery of importance, has another hardboiled and absorbing tale of the men of the merchant shipping in the next issue—don't miss it!



Death and diplomacy below the border—

SALT OF THE SERVICE

By A. DUNN

CAPTAIN O'HARA is not his name, but this is the story he gave me in the hospital garden at Brest after he said, "I'm dying three years too late." He was a man of bitterness and a sense of the past. A soldier, with memories—

Sick with shame, Cavalry Troop G fumbled its retreat through Chihuahua's desolation of hill and sand. Quivering tentacles of heat lashed weary, half-starved bodies. Miniature eddies of dust raised by every movement of hoof or boot rose, spread, weakened and dropped back, covering men, horses and equipment with fine, impalpable shrouds of gray.

Grim-lipped faces moulded by common emotion into strangely similar masks, they paused beside a mound outside Carrizal. Here, their allies, the Carranzistas, had murdered Captain Boyd when he advanced towards them under a flag of truce. Here, these same allies had heaped the wounded and dead of two American troops and cremated them, as a man burns refuse in his back yard. From this spot, they had led seventeen gringoes in prolonged parade through the streets of northern Mexico. The natives, the same people who burn Judas once each year, stoned them and spat upon them.

This was the Army's monument to watchful waiting for peace at any price.

The Tenth American Cavalry had

suffered torture and death. None of the living asked why. Long before they had learned there was no answer.

For ten months they had lived on scant rations of beans, canned meats and dried fruits; drinking from the same alkali pools where their mounts washed cankered mouths. When the mules died, they themselves turned beasts of burden. They bore all hardships in the hope that they served some ideal purpose they could not understand. Now they knew that all they had accomplished was to change Mexico's fear into contempt. On the flyspecked walls of the towns placards triumphantly announced: *"The Retreat of the Cowardly Gringos!"*

Hate surged like a giant pulse. Set eyes stared at the town. Captain O'Hara sensed the change in himself. Each of them was a dynamic center of destruction. He uttered a sharp command, rode between the eyes of his men and the town. Slowly, the military machine was reassembled.

One more, they pressed through the heat and dust. Dirty, threadbare uniforms irritated their fleabitten skins. The white glare fed the fire in their bloodshot eyes. The great Punitive Expedition of 1916 crept home.

At noon, they found a spring and a pool in a green barranca, between two flat-topped hills. Like some giant copperhead they serpentined through the chaparral into the narrow canyon roofed with cottonwood and willow.

Water, shade and rest lightened most of the physical strain and some of the mental. At the base of one hill they built a corral with old supply wagons and antiquated trucks and staked the mules and horses in it. On the slope and the mesa above, they stretched the pup tents over parched grass, wherever they could find space between thickets of nopal and hedgehog cactus. They placed the machine guns and howitzers, most of these facing the arid depression before them, where they could overlook a town some five miles distant. It was a gaunt ironic gesture.

As soon as they finished, officers and men waded into the pool. For the first time in eight days' march, they bathed and washed their clothes. Still listless, but not so depressed, they sprawled under the trees. Some talked quietly; others dozed.

"Thank God for water!" sighed Captain O'Hara. He sat with Captain Edwards, the company surgeon, on a ledge overlooking the canyon. The doctor's shrewd, birdlike glance darted from the men to their redheaded leader. The broad-shouldered, narrow-hipped big body and the large-skulled, large-featured face indicated the fighter whom training could turn into a detached, impersonal, military automaton; but a sensitivity of lip and eye proved that no drilling could make him an ideal Army man. He reacted too intensely to emotion.

Edwards' ironic smile deepened the wrinkles in his spare weatherbeaten face. "Our spirits were tried, that we might prove worthy. Now we are permitted to enter paradise."

O'Hara snorted. "You're never grateful for anything, are you?"

"At fifty, I find few things to be grateful for," replied the other drily. "My patient may offer thanks that I'm cutting him open for a tumor instead of a cancer, but I can't join him. Nine chances out of ten, he's coming back."

O'Hara started to argue, then changed his mind. The pallor of strain and exhaustion had given the wiry little man's face a deathlike thinness. Instead, he lit his pipe and they smoked in silence.

Behind them, twigs and leaves crackled under heavy feet. They looked back. Private Gates, hardbitten oldtimer, saluted.

"There's a Mexican who says he's a colonel in the Federal army up there, Captain. He's got another guy with him. He says he's got to talk with you immediately." O'Hara caught the resentment in Gates' voice.

"What's the matter?"

"He's awful fresh, sir. He acted like he was sending for a private!"

Copper-blue eyes hardened. That was the usual attitude of Carranza's officers toward Americans. He should have become accustomed to it, but he hadn't. "Tell him I'll be up shortly!" he snapped. "And keep him waiting in the sun!" Private Gates grinned as he headed back.

"Want me along?' asked Edwards. Captain O'Hara spoke Spanish, but not as fluently as the doctor, who had been reared in a mining camp in Sonora.

"If you don't mind," mocked the Irishman. Doc Edwards' pointed nose was twitching with curiosity.

"You big ham," commented the Doc. Neither ever admitted to an admiration for the other. Their friendship was too deep for that.

"We'd better see if we can find some shirts," laughed O'Hara, looking from Edwards' thin chest to his own barrel.

"We put on wet shirts for no man!" barked Doc Edwards. "I'll fry in this damn country, but I won't steam to death! Come on!"

THEY scrambled over the lip of the barranca, then leisurely descended towards the two men standing by the corral. One was a cognac-bellied, crane-legged, half-breed. A heavily waxed, long black mustache separated pig's eyes and nose from a swine's mouth. The other was a six-foot Indian, broadshouldered, flat-hipped. Intelligent black eyes set in an eagle's face stared up at them. His clean if faded dungarees and khaki shirt contrasted with his companion's spotted twill and tarnished gold braid like a mountain spring with a scummed jungle pool.

The swarthy *mestizo* glared at the two gringos naked to the waists like peons. Contempt flickered in his narrowed black eyes. "Which one of you is *El Capitan* in charge of these!" he asked arrogantly. He waved a fat-knuckled dirty hand towards the kitchen squad, which was peering at them with interest.

Disliking the man and objecting to his tone and manner, O'Hara said nothing for a minute. He held the man's gaze with his hard cold look until the other began to squirm.

"I am!" he said sharply.

"I am Colonel Carlos Pardo, commander of the garrison at La Maria!" It was not an introduction. It was a declaration of power. "This," he nodded towards the Indian," is *Capitan* Garcia."

O'Hara's voice was thick with annoyance. "I'm Captain O'Hara. The officer with me is Captain Edwards, our company doctor."

An expressionless monotone cut in. The Yaqui spoke to Edwards. "You are a doctor. You are sick. Why do you not cure yourself?"

Startled, the three looked at him. Edwards smiled gravely and, all unexpectedly, answered in Yaqui. "It is a sickness of soul and not the body. My skill is not that of Rafael Garcia of Santa Rosalia."

"Thy name again?" came the swift question, also in Yaqui.

"Juan Eduardo, son of Pablo Eduardo, of the Guadalupe mine at Sahuripa." He extended a small, bony hand.

The Yaqui took it. A smile spread gradually from his eyes to his thin lips.

"For the love of God, what is this?" burst from Pardo. Anxiety and a mild fear made his highpitched voice shriller. He did not like this evidence of friendship between his aide and the doctor. It had been hard enough to convince the devil as it was.

Scornful amusement gleamed in the Yaqui's eyes. "This is the son of a man who helped many of my people escape the slave raiders sent by Diaz. He knew my cousin, famous among us as a healer. I have never met him and he has never seen me, but naturally we are friends." His face hardened. "We go home, now."

Pardo ignored him. He turned to

O'Hara. "*Capitan Ojara,* as representative of the Mexican Government, I demand that you and your men leave here immediately!"

O'Hara stiffened. "Why?"

"Because he hates all *Americanos,* and for no other reason," was Garcia's calm interjection. "But do not worry. I give you permission to remain here as long as you wish." There was no condescension. It was the gift of a friend.

O'Hara was white with anger. He wanted to slap the halfbreed into hell and tell him he wouldn't move his men if the entire Mexican Government demanded it. But he could not. His instructions were definite. He was to do anything to conciliate the natives. The only thing which prevented a forced march was the Yaqui's assistance.

"They will move!" spat Pardo. He jumped back. Garcia had stepped towards him. He reached for his gun.

"Do not touch it," warned Garcia. "If you kill me before I do you, two hundred Yaquis will finish my job." He was unflurried. The words were not spoken threateningly. They were a statement of fact. He waited until Pardo's hand moved to his mustache before he continued. "We will leave these *Americanos* alone, since there is no reason for their not staying."

All the arrogance fled. The colonel was, or pretended to be, aghast. His reproof was mild. "You must not speak to me like that. I am your commanding officer. I am the one to give the orders."

Angry as they both were, the Americans had to grin when Garcia informed him dryly, "You give them when we permit. We do not permit now. We go back."

"Oh!" screamed Pardo. His small, sharply pointed teeth clicked shut. He stamped his foot. He ducked, but Garcia caught him by the collar and shook him.

"Stop acting like a child one minute and a woman the next!" he growled.

"I will have you shot for this!"

Edwards stepped quickly towards them. "I do not want you to be harmed for any help you may give us, Garcia!"

The Yaqui's lips thinned. "He will do nothing. My two hundred can whip the four hundred thieves he brought with him, and he knows it." He shrugged. "If they can't, there are ten thousand at home who will." With a final shake, he released his colonel.

The colonel turned sorrowful. "How can I serve my country when I am surrounded by traitors and betrayed on every hand?"

Doc Edwards snickered. "A tent-show Simon Legree!"

"Funny, except that the whippings and deaths are a little too real," was O'Hara's grim comment. With a bow, which did not seem incongruous, although he was half-naked and sweating like a stevedore, he thanked Captain Garcia for his kindness. "I hope this meets with your approval?" he asked Pardo.

"It does, does it not?" questioned Garcia derisively.

Pardo whined, swung on his heel and headed for the horses tethered to a scrub oak nearby.

"He is not happy," said Garcia solemnly. He clasped the hand of each in a firm, hard grasp. "And, go with God," he replied to Doc Edwards courtly, "I give you my thanks."

As soon as the pair disappeared behind the wagons, O'Hara groaned, "Do you realize that if he hadn't helped us we'd had to move?"

The doctor's eyes were flinty. "I read our orders, too!" he said. "God God! Why can't we indict statesmen and politicians for malpractice on men's souls!"

Like an ox dragging weight too heavy for it, O'Hara climbed to his tent.

BY EIGHT o'clock, the camp slept, but fitfully, as children caught in a stream of nightmares. They wakened to the scream of a coyote, the click of a spur,

the thud of a hoof or a soft whinny. In the shadows hollowed from the hard yellow moonlight, the sentries met and whispered. The moon thinned, dropped, was gone.

Suddenly a scream, shrill and agonizing as the cry of a wounded stallion, jerked the camp from sleep. Before the men had time to grope for their guns and crawl from their beds, a sentry guarding the hilltop sprang for a floodlight. It caught, held and followed about ten Mexicans leaping through the chaparral on the right slope. With a wild yell, the Americans took after them, scattering so that they could circle them. They stopped to fire, but their bullets struck earth. The Mexicans zigzagged, did not turn.

Captain O'Hara reached the machine gun on the mesa just as its clocklike tick marked eternity for the quivering, rolling bodies. They had a flat look, like paper dolls swirling in the wind.

A sergeant's whistle signaled from the barranca. The rear men swerved. Like dust before a broom they tumbled ahead of the light. It cut past them. Two more Mexicans jumping for the safety of the steep incline stopped abruptly, raised their hands.

Lieutenant Howe placed them under guard and sent them to O'Hara's tent. He and the other officers led the men in the search for other groups, but they found none. Behind the hill, about a quarter of a mile up a canyon, they discovered eleven saddled horses, obviously the attackers' mounts. These they led to camp.

Meanwhile, groans, curses, hysterical laughter rising to a roaring moan came from a group crowded about some tents at the spot where the first group of Mexicans had been seen. Tall, lanky young Lieutenant Wales met Captain O'Hara as he ran down. His movements were uncoordinated, his eyes unfocused with horror. He swayed slightly. "They've—" he sobbed— "they've stabbed and gutted four of our men while they slept!" His shaking fingers thrust a paper at the captain. "They left this."

Scrawled in English on a piece of pink notepaper was:

"A farewell kiss for the gringos."

The vindictiveness of a cursed, misbegotten breed! O'Hara, feeling like a blind man leading the blind, pushed past the boy. "Check the barranca!" he ordered gruffly, more to keep the youngster busy than for any need for the action.

The strained, haggard faces of the men looked up at him. They must not break. They were shivering. It was not cold.

Doc Edwards rose. "They're dead," he said dully. "Evidently they were stabbed first and then slit with machetes."

O'Hara stared at them. They had been backed from gullet to cleft, like steers on a slaughterhouse table. He had them covered with their blankets. Friends carried them into the Red Cross tent. "Report to Lieutenant Wales!" rang the command. "He's searching the barranca!" The stains were dark but they soon would dry.

The two prisoners, both young, stared with fanatical hatred at their gringo captor. They were dressed in Carranzista uniforms, carried guns sold to their president with Washington's consent.

To O'Hara's question, "Who are you?" they answered, "We are rebels. We wish to kill all gringos. We came and we killed. That is all."

"Why do you wear Federal uniforms and carry Federal guns if you are rebels?"

Sullen, they refused to answer. "Then I know you are from Pardo!" exclaimed O'Hara.

The darker spoke quickly. "We stole them!"

Those were the only questions they would answer. To all others, they re-

plied, *"No se,"*—I do not know. Their hands were tied behind them, their feet hobbled, and they were thrown, none too gently, into one of the supply wagons. The guards hoped they'd try to escape and gave them every chance, but they lay apathetically where they had been tossed. Their dead comrades lay near them. They had no fear. Their Government would not let them be hurt by the gringos.

Two hours later, they faced Captain O'Hara and the officers' court in the mess tent. For the first time in their lives, as the inquiry proceeded, they were impressed and terrified by the *Americanos*. They were so solemn and tried them so calmly, they must be planning some torture which would be as horrible as a Zapatista joke.

"We are trying you for murder," O'Hara explained to them. "This attack was not war, as men know it, but murder. We have appointed a man to speak for you. We will hear both sides of the case. Then we will vote."

They nodded. The man was lying. Nobody but a fool would let his men be killed and then offer justice to the men who had killed them. Therefore, they admitted they had killed.

"You murdered that soldier we found in the barranca?" asked Lieutenant Wales, his lips paling at the memory of the head he had tripped over.

"Si, señor."

The officers voted.

O'Hara spoke to the prisoners. "We have found you guilty. We sentence you to be shot tomorrow at dawn."

They accepted it stoically. They had expected it. All that talk over nothing!

Troop G did not march that day. It buried the Mexicans. They treated their bodies carefully, feeling no rancor towards the dead. They built five coffins and lined them with canvas and salt. They laid the corpses in these. Edwards had patched them in the hope that they would not rot so quickly.

With a squad of men Captain O'Hara rode to the railroad some three miles east to file his morning report to his army headquarters by telegraph. He detailed the matter to the General in terse, eloquent sentences, and had his prompt approval. O'Hara was commended for the fairness of the trial. He chuckled. At the end of the official report after the General's name was, "Thank God, they can't question us on this! Good luck!"

He did not feel more than slightly irritated when he returned and found Pardo, Garcia and an effeminate Spaniard, one Captain Hernandez, waiting for him. But he was highly surprised when Pardo spoke as politely as a cadet requesting a chaperone for a dance. He insisted upon shaking hands. His were hot and sticky, Garcia's were hard and dry, the Spaniard's like cactus pulp.

"I have come to express to you how sorry we are that these terrible *bandidos* attacked our allies," he began grandiosely.

"How did you find out?"

Pardo gulped. He strove to appear mysterious. His arch look made Captain O'Hara feel as thought he had swallowed a piece of candy whole.

"Ah, señor! We have ways of learning things. These are military secrets. You will pardon if I do not tell them." He glanced suggestively at the mess tent. O'Hara took the hint and invited them to enter. Doc Edwards was asleep, his head on his arms, resting on the table. O'Hara shook it gently.

After greetings so effuse from Pardo and Hernandez that Edwards decided he was still asleep, the colonel continued. "We are deeply ashamed at this outrage. We are near, yet they flaunt us. The prestige and morale of the Mexican Army are at stake. We must avenge this dastardly crime! We must avenge it in blood! We must punish these men as they deserve!"

"We've done that already," interrupted Edwards. "We killed nine last night

and we're shooting the other two at dawn."

The colonel gasped. He had not expected the Americans to interrupt his oratory. They had no delicacy, no finesse. He tried again.

"The Mexican Government wishes to express to you its deep sorrow for the loss of your men. We would like to prove—"

"How did you know we'd lost any men?" cut in O'Hara.

The halfbreed sighed patiently. "By the same method of which I cannot speak. We are very sorry. We would like to prove our friendship for you. Therefore we ask," he took a deep breath, "that you turn these men over to us for punishment." He glanced at one and then the other. He did not like their grins. His eyes slid quickly away from Miguel's.

"No use, Pardo," laughed O'Hara. "We'll do that job ourselves. We know they were your men, sent out by you, and we—"

"Is that true?" demanded Garcia. It was significant that he looked at Captain O'Hara, not at Pardo.

"We believe them to be," admitted O'Hara. "They wear the Federal uniform."

"May I see the two *prisoneros*?" The face had settled into its usual immobile watchfulness.

"Certainly. I will take you myself." O'Hara was glad of the added proof. He took the Indian to the wagon.

Garcia nodded. "They are Pardo's. I shall have to attend to this. I told him you were my friends." He climbed to the tent with the effortless grace of those bred in the mountains.

O'Hara despised himself for saying, "If you don't mind, I'd appreciate it if you wouldn't get into a row here. It would only make it more difficult for us."

The Yaqui stopped, faced him, his high forehead narrowed in a puzzled frown. "I cannot understand why you do not fight, you and your Army. I see you are brave. I see you wish to avenge your wrongs."

O'Hara said, "We swear loyalty and allegiance to our President—not to the man, but to the office. If we did not obey because we did not like or understand our orders, we would be like Mexico. We would have anarchy and suffering. We cannot break our oaths."

The Yaqui thought. "I am sorry for you," he told him sincerely.

In the tent, Pardo scarcely waited for them to enter before he said hurriedly, "I am really anxious to punish these men. They have betrayed me. I will tell you frankly that I planned this. Then, when Miguel Garcia told me you were under his protection, I ordered them to remain in the *cuartel*. They disobeyed." A desperate man is a good actor, particularly if he comes from a bastard race which dramatizes even the purchase of a piece of fish.

"You were certain you gave them those orders?" asked Garcia.

"Positive! Ask the *prisoneros!*"

"We'll take your word for it, Pardo," said Captain O'Hara. "But that doesn't alter the situation. Our injury is greater than yours, therefore we have the first right to punish them. We have tried them, and we have our General's permission. Those men are going to be shot—by us!"

Furious at the Yaqui, raging at the gringos who dared defy him, Pardo kicked back his camp stool. Trembling with anger, he leaned towards the big Irishman and spat, "In the name of the Mexican Government, I forbid you to murder those two men! You—!"

Doc Edwards jumped, just in time, and caught O'Hara's arm. The impetus of his leap and the force behind the blow threw him against Pardo. They sprawled over the chairs and finally dropped in the dust. Miguel grabbed Hernandez as he tried to pull a gun. Pardo screamed and clawed wildly over Doc Edwards to get away from those

hands. O'Hara reached, ravenous, mad.

"Let him alone, you fool!" yelled Edwards. "Do you want any more trouble?"

Captain O'Hara's chest ached. The artery in his throat pounded blindness into his eyes, but he stopped.

So courteously that it was an insult, Edwards helped Pardo to rise and brushed the dust that did not stick to the grime from the twill and gold braid. With shaking fingers, warily watching O'Hara, the colonel lighted a cigarette. But suddenly he retched. Like most of his kind, he could face a bullet or a knife with a fatalist's bravery, but fists not only frightened him but made him ill.

"Have you any document which proves that you make a formal request from your Government?" barked O'Hara.

"None," snarled Pardo.

"Then good day!" snapped O'Hara. He called to the guard. "Escort these gentlemen to their horses."

Without a word, they filed out. Garcia gravely returned the two salutes.

AT FOUR o'clock, Captain O'Hara rode to the railroad to make his afternoon's report. He was asked by the line to wait. The General was talking with Washington. O'Hara and the men crouched on their haunches nearby, hiding in the shade cast by their horses.

And at that moment, under the bony curve of his mare's belly, O'Hara saw with dismay and a certain amount of hopeless amusement, two horsemen galloping from the town towards the direction of the camp. One was slightly ahead.

O'Hara could not recognize them, but he knew who they were. He groaned. Behind him, he heard the telegraph key clicking. He rose and moved towards the pole where Corporal Grimes was perched. He saw the corporal's mouth open, his eyes round. The corporal tapped furiously. He scribbled the code coming to him. He backed down the pole. His face was sullen.

"It's right, Captain. I had them repeat it."

CAPTAIN THOMAS O'HARA, IN COMMAND TROOP G.

FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS RECEIVED FROM WASHINGTON, I COMMAND YOU TO RELEASE TWO MEXICAN PRISONERS SLATED FOR EXECUTION TOMORROW AT DAWN TO MEXICAN OFFICIAL REPRESENTATIVE, COLONEL CARLOS PARDO. PROCEED AT DAWN TOMORROW ON SCHEDULE LINE OF MARCH. REPORT RETURN OF PRISONERS, WHAT HOUR AND WHERE. OBTAIN WRITTEN STATEMENT FROM COLONEL PARDO ON ACCEPTANCE.

Unable to believe it, O'Hara decoded it again. He raged, impotently. His jaw muscles stood out like cords. The air was streaked with red arrows of feeling. Realizing the men were watching him, the captain instinctively groped for the more familiar O'Hara, the military automaton.

"Let's go," he said listlessly. He walked stiffly and precisely to his mare.

"Come on, you—!" rasped Corporal Grimes, as he swung into the saddle. The men were too puzzled to resent his epithet. Grimes leaned towards O'Hara and whispered, "Let's ride like hell, sir. That always helps."

His captain threw him a grateful look. They were off, like Norns flying the winds. The faster he galloped, the faster O'Hara's mind moved. He'd make it clear that the men were to be punished. He'd make Pardo act the part, too. How had Pardo worked it? What had he told them? Why were they here? Why was anybody any place? Who made all the slate that shattered under his horses' hooves?

He noticed his officers and Pardo and Garcia standing under the oak by the wagon where the prisoners lay. He rode up to them and dropped off.

Doc Edwards spoke quickly. "Garcia has something to tell you, Tom."

A set, ruthless determination had hardened the Yaqui's features. "Pardo wired Mexico City that you had at-

tacked his men and were going to kill two *prisoneros* in order that they might not speak against you. They wired Washington. We got the information that you would turn them over to us. A Yaqui told me. I brought Pardo." The halfbreed's face was strangely yellow with unexpected terror and fear of Garcia. His holster was empty. Garcia's right hand fingered a foot-long machete, his left an old Mauser.

"I will turn them over to you immediately." O'Hara assured him, sick at the task.

The guards released the men and stood them beside the wagon.

"I cannot turn them over to you without a formal release," he added heavily when they stepped back.

"Give it to him, Pardito," murmured the Yaqui.

Pardo's eyes pled for help, but he said nothing. He passed a crumpled paper to O'Hara. It was the acceptance.

Lieutenant Howe broke in. "I say, sir, would you mind telling us just what this is all about? We can't understand what you're saying. All we know is that Doc asked us to meet you here."

Doc Edwards answered. He no longer seemed an ironic little man, but more like a judge gravely pronouncing sentence. "Gentlemen, you are about to see justice. I do not know whether you will approve or whether you will revolt against it. It does not matter. Think it over, and it will be done by then. Have patience for a while."

O'Hara whispered a grim question in his ear. "Is Garcia going to kill Pardo?"

"Not that I know of," came the disappointing answer. "Just wait and see."

The halfbreed whimpered. Garcia had grabbed his shoulder and turned him so he faced the two prisoners. "Are you ready?" he asked sternly.

"For the love of God!" shrieked Pardo, struggling to free himself. A clout on one ear quieted him.

"You prefer the death by a little cut, a little poison?"

The captive shuddered. "No, I will do as you say. I am ready."

Garcia pulled a revolver from his hip. He passed it forward to Pardo. His machete scraped the colonel's neck.

"Shoot!"

Pardo fired once at each man.

They straightened. One dropped. The other tried to run.

Pardo emptied his gun into him, but not before he had heard the man blubber, "Traitor!"

Pardo threw the gun angrily at the man's head. It cut his right eye.

Garcia swung Pardo around. He held him while he spoke to Edwards. "Go thou with God, my friend."

Edwards said, "You have saved the spirits of this company. For that, Garcia, I give my eternal gratitude. Go thou also with God, my friend."

The Yaqui bowed. He kicked the halfbreed. "March!"

At dawn, Troop G fumbled its way home through Chihuahua's desolation of hill and sand, leaving death behind.

In another week it would read of German atrocities in poor defenseless Belgium.

TALKING DRUMS

Again—a Grim and Gripping Story of the Headhunters, and Forbidden Gold

By CAPTAIN FREDERICK MOORE

"WHAT ARE you doing here in the headhunting country?" I asked Anderson as he stood at Jim Sing's bar and waited for the black boys to take his bags to the upper floor.

Anderson turned quickly, and said—"Come out from behind that newspaper. I knew you by them white pants. Don't try to hide."

I threw the paper down on the marble-topped table and shook hands with Anderson as he came across the room to me. He was a trader in the islands down in the Dutch country two years before when I was coming up to the Mawa River for gold. It was not until I got to Sydney after Bannister and McLaw were killed that I heard Anderson had lost a schooner over New Guinea way.

"There's a chance to take over Hanf's trading business here," I told him.

Anderson nodded, and sat down heavily in a bamboo chair. He winked an eye and then looked round the deserted bar to make sure nobody was listening. "So I've heard. But as I understand it, there's no business here for a trader—unless it's selling tin hatchets to Jim Sing, who swaps 'em for gold to the headhunters."

"Hanf made money."

"And got a poisoned blow-gun arrow in his neck. I saw his grave over on the sand flats as I came ashore."

"Are you still trading?"

"Are you still looking for gold up the Mawa?"

"I came back here to think it over."

"You're just the man I'm looking for. You've been up the river—and got back alive. I want some Mawa River gold."

"Those are bad natives up in the hills. And I don't see any equipment for fighting headhunters in the baggage that came ashore with you."

"I came with something better than guns to get gold."

"Couple of blackjacks, I presume."

"I'll show you after dark. I don't want Jim Sing to know why I'm here—but I do need you in my business."

Anderson was mysterious, which was natural enough in Jim Sing's grass hotel. The old Chinese had the island—and the gold nuggets it produced—in the hollow of his yellow hand. If Jim Sing was willing you should stay, you stayed. And he was most dangerous when he smiled, took your money for your board and room, and was serenely optimistic about your chances for making a fortune. There was a large graveyard of white men down on the sand flats. They all came to Jim Sing's to get rich.

A big man, who had pockets for small automatic pistols in the legs of his laced mining boots, Anderson had made several fortunes. It was easy enough to get rich in the Mawa country. The trick was to get away alive with the riches. Jim Sing shipped his gains out to China, by devious methods of smuggling, and admitted that it was time he left for China himself. But nobody believed him.

It was only an hour later that Anderson revealed to me the secret which had brought him to Jim Sing's. The trader held it before me by the light from a smoky lamp in his room above the bar.

"What do you think of that?" Anderson asked me.

I drew away in horror. Anderson, his big round head in relief against the lamp as he leaned down to me with what he plainly regarded as a treasure, became at the moment something of a monster—and a monster which belonged in the jungles of the hills behind the hotel.

What Anderson showed me was the dried head of a man—a white man.

I could not answer his question for a minute. The trader was holding the head by its yellowish hair. The upper teeth gleamed in the lamplight. There was no lower jaw, for headhunters mostly remove the lower jaw. Dried by smoke over a slow fire, the head was shrunken to about the size of two fists, the skin of the cheeks shriveled like a baked apple, and two black cavities for the eyes.

I have seen plenty of dried human heads. This was the first time I had seen a white man gloat over such a trophy, grinning with prideful satisfaction. His great paw of a hand extended to me, his arms bare in a sleeveless undershirt, and the knees of his legs bent, I disliked Anderson at that moment more than I disliked the sight of a headhunter's blood lust.

"Where did you get it?"

"From the Dutch—at Banjermassin."

"When the Dutch seize heads of white men, they keep them."

Anderson grinned and tossed the head back into his bag. "You know I'm lying. Maybe you think that I've been up the Mawa looking for the heads of Bannister or McLaw?" Then he sat in his canvas chair and his black eyes held mine in a challenging manner.

"No. But I'm going up the Mawa when I get ready, and bring back their heads. I was with 'em when they were killed."

"How much gold did you bring down the river?"

"Not enough to speak of."

"There's plenty up there."

"Oh, yes. That's no secret."

"You're the only white man that I know of who's been up the river and came back alive."

"There's little profit in that fact—for me or anybody else."

"Jim Sing gets gold out."

"That's his private mine."

"I want you to go in with me to get some of that gold."

I HAD no leaning for throwing in with a man who packed dried human heads about in his baggage as if they were regular equipment.

"How are we going to get up there?"

Anderson pushed a bottle forward on the table. It was a Dutch liquor, bland and soothing, more syrup than anything else. I took a drink just to be polite. Anderson leaned back and frowned at me, as if I stood athwart him and the gold in the upper reaches of the Mawa.

"What do we need to go up the river?"

"A cabin cruiser housed with sheet iron—and get away without Jim Sing knowing we're on our way."

"We might do that—later."

"Better talk it over with the natives first, if you can."

"How can I get a message to 'em?"

"Jim Sing might send it—but he won't."

"Of course he won't. But I intend to out-think this slick Chink. He gets about a hundred dollars for a hatchet, taking nuggets in exchange. I can beat him at his own game."

"You've got to be good. Hanf tried him and his bones will rot here. Bannister and McLaw left their heads in the hills."

"What'll a headhunter pay for a head?"

"The young bloods need a head before they can get married. Perhaps you intend to sell 'em heads."

Anderson blew smoke up into the rafters under the thatched roof. "I do intend to try that very thing."

I blinked into the lamplight, incredulous and somewhat shocked at the infamous idea. I said sharply, "No!"

"Don't say no at me like that. I'm talking turkey. They'll pay high for heads already smoked."

"Your own will also do nicely."

"I'm no wedding ring," said Anderson.

"You must be fooling when you talk of supplying heads to headhunters in the present stage of Christian civilization!"

"I can get enough of 'em to make a fortune on—and that'll make me a better Christian."

"Perhaps you intend to bribe Dutch officials and get the heads picked up in headhouses by the soldiers? I can tell you now that you won't be able to ship 'em."

"Don't worry about the shipping part, I can get an unlimited supply."

"Hell, man! You're not talking seriously!"

"Now, don't be so shocked over a traffic in human heads. I like you because you are shocked, but this whole country reeks with the business. Many a man in civilization—and woman, too—lives soft and gentle as the result of trading with headhunters. We can mop up in six months."

"I'm not sure I want to go in on the game."

"Don't get haired up."

"There isn't a government that won't throw you into a deep and dark jail if they catch you at it."

"Nonsense! I'm a fairly good smuggler."

"No nonsense about it. The various governments controlling islands out in these waters wants to put down the habit of headhunting among the natives. You'll be encouraging it."

"Nobody worries about how many heads are taken, if the country pays by buying goods, keeping ships busy, and gold comes out."

"Native heads, no. But you're talking white heads. And white heads are worth their weight in gold. That makes it unhealthy for the white men out here

trying to make the islands pay."

Anderson shot his big jaw toward me. "One of the chief things that makes it hard to deal with yellow and brown people is that white men shoot off their faces when they don't know what they're talking about."

"I know what I'm talking about."

"You think you do. You're wrong. I've put something over on you, and I've sat back and listened just to see how you'd take the business. Now then, wake up! I'll be acting as the agent of a government. I'm buying my heads from a government—but on the quiet, of course."

"Are you talking straight?"

"If it got noised about, the missionaries would raise hell, and the government knows it. I'm the guy who'll hold the sack when the blow-off comes—if it ever does come, which it won't because we'll keep our mouths shut, and Jim Sing won't know anything that can be used as evidence."

"I don't see why I should have anything to do with it."

Anderson laughed. He brought his round double-handled bag to the table, and laid out four more heads.

I got to my feet, tempted to knock Anderson down. You can overlook wild men in the jungle piling up human skulls, but to see a white man with a pile of white skulls, with dried blood in the hair, making a business of such things, was more than my nerves could stand.

"Good night!" I said, and started for the door.

Anderson grabbed me. "These heads are manufactured. Don't blow out any cylinders until you're on solid ground. The whole game is to save lives, and to stop headhunting."

I stopped, staring at Anderson in disbelief.

"It was necessary to fool you. You don't like the sight of these heads. That means the headhunters will. Look 'em over. Some of the teeth filled with brass. Rust stains on the hair that looks like blood spots. Different colored hair—but the skulls all made from the same mold. They cost me ten dollars each. The government makes a profit at that figure, and the profits will be used to maintain hospitals and pay missionaries."

"The missionaries will raise merry hell if they find out."

"They won't. I'm going to use Jim Sing as broker. If the hillmen can buy heads they won't kill white men to get 'em. It will wipe out warfare among the tribes, increase marriages, more natives will produce more jungle products and everybody happy."

"And Jim Sing will be blamed if the low down blows."

"Exactly! That's what Chinks are for—to blame things on. It's a whale of an idea—philanthrophy tied to profit."

"The customers get what they want and their morals are improved. I'll ride with you on that basis."

"Good! Most people would think there was a catch in it, because I've no great reputation as a Santa Claus. But I need you to bolster up Jim Sing's confidence, and two white men are safer than one."

"What will you consider a fair profit per head?"

"All we can get out of Jim. We don't want to flood the market. A few at a high profit, instead of a lot at a low. If we show too many to Jim at a time, he'll smell four rats."

"You ought to be several hundred dollars to the good on every head."

"We could make more if we worked through the sea tribes at the mouth of the Mawa, and got in direct touch with the hillmen."

"Nothing doing. Hillmen wouldn't buy from them or from us. Besides, the sea tribes can't chance having white men clamp down on 'em for having white heads. They're at war with the hill men, and if they have to fight the white men too, the sea tribes are wiped out. Jim Sing is the man."

"THAT'S WHAT I thought. Suppose you go down and sound him out. But I don't think we ought to tell him these heads are manufactured."

"Certainly not. He'll have to find it out if he can, and that'll be his grief if the natives don't like the heads."

"You'd trim a Chink, but not a native," said Anderson, as he winked.

"Don't worry about Jim Sing getting trimmed. He'll get his own margin of profit. He's shipping gold out of this country hidden in coconuts, and if you show him how to speed up making fortunes, he won't care where the heads come from or what they are. Show him one as a sample, and let him try his hand at the game. You'll get action, don't worry."

"Then you think he'll buy from us and sell to the natives?"

"I think he'll do anything that'll fatten his fortune. He can out-trade us. We've got to remember that he'll buy to the best advantage. There's a saying among the Chinese that the poor man proclaims his poverty, but the rich man conceals his wealth."

Anderson put away all the heads but one, and that he put under his pillow.

I went down to the bar and found Jim gambling with himself. He shook dice out of a brass cup, shifted money from one pile to another, and made a record of the play. It was a game he had been at for twenty years. He was still computing odds, trying to build a system against loss in any series of throws of the dice. It was a hobby of his and the knowledge he gained he regarded as insurance against loss of fortune in his old age. Chinese would rather win a dime gambling than earn a thousand dollars in trade.

The old boy looked up as I entered the bar. He knew I had been in Anderson's room. There was small chance he had heard anything we said. His boys in the nearby cook shack were washing dishes and pans while a blind Chinese played a flute for them.

"Jim, you want to make some money?" I backed up to the zinc bar and rested my elbows on it.

"What kind talk you say?" demanded Jim scornfully. That was his way of wanting to know why I asked silly questions.

"You make a bucket of money every time you go out in the jungle and leave two trade hatchets for the headhunters. That's small business."

"Small business make big rich."

"I'm asking you if you want to make big money quick."

Jim threw the dice from his brass cup, made a reckoning on a paper with his paint brush, shifted silver from one pile to another, and laid out coins for his next bet from the nearest pile. Then he shook the dice in the cup. "Hanf tell it to you how I make money."

"Sure Hanf told me."

Jim tossed the silken end of his queue over his shoulder and paused with the upraised cup for the next cast. But he did not let the dice go. "Hanf come home dead," he remarked.

"Yes. He got an arrow, and it killed him quick."

"Bannister not come back."

"Bannister got killed up the river with me."

"McLaw not come back this side."

"He got killed with Bannister."

"Quick time get rich, four men. Quick time three dead. No good get rich short time. What you think?"

"What you think?"

"I think no can do get rich quick time. Long time get rich, maybe, short time get rich, quick time dead." He threw the dice as if to test fate, hissed through his teeth, shifted coins, painted four grass houses in a row on the paper, and gave me a sly look.

"Well," I said with all the despondency I could muster, "if you don't want to make any more money, Anderson and I will go and do business with the natives ourselves."

Jim winked with both eyes, the only sign of excitement he ever betrayed, and

reached for a piece of twine. He drew it from a cast iron box in the shape of a dragon. He handed me three feet of string. "You take stling, tie on head," he advised. Then he shook the dice in the brass cup.

I proceeded to tie the string over my scalp and under my chin. Jim Sing looked at me with frank astonishment. There is nothing which startles a Chinese more than to do what he does not expect you to do. Such an action seems to leave him helpless and he feels that guile is useless.

"Why for you do this?" he demanded.

"Now," said I, "how much you pay me for this head?"

Jim Sing threw his brass cup aside in disgust. "Why for you talk like plenty damn fool?"

"You sell white man head to natives in hills. More better as hatchets on stump for gold."

Jim laughed heartily. All Chinese are fond of jokes. "You sell him head, huh?" More better you keep head for look-see, eat dinner, talk plenty."

"How much is a white man's head worth in gold?" I persisted.

Jim closed his eyes. He was beginning to understand that there was something behind my nonsense. "One t'ousan' dolla, gol'," he said.

"Maybe you catch five thousand dollars, gold."

"Mr. Antasan, him fliend to you?" asked Jim. Now I knew that he had divined the fact that Anderson was behind my seeming foolishness in asking such questions.

"Yes. Maybe more better you come up and talk with him. You make lot of money. Good business."

Jim tidied up his dice and coins, wrapped his queue round his skull, and rose. He sang something in the direction of the cook shack. The flute stopped its tune. I followed him up the stairs with the string still on my head. This was my way of holding his mind on the subject to be discussed.

Anderson looked at me as if he thought I was suddenly loony. I winked at him and took off the string. Jim looked about the room and put his hands up the sleeves of his blouse. He had pockets in his wide sleeves where he carried small automatic pistols.

"Have a drink, Jim. Some of the real stuff from the Dutch, with a sneak fuse in it and a bursting charge made for swift destruction. Smooth as new milk. The Dutch make gin for trade, but this they make to drink themselves—and you can't beat the Dutch." Anderson poured some of the brown syrup and handed the glass to Jim.

"He says the hillmen will give a thousand dollars for a white man's head," I remarked to Anderson. "He means that the gold they'll give is worth that much."

"How does he know?"

JIM inhaled some of the Dutch liquor, and laid back in his chair. I think that he suspected we intended to take his head and sell it to the hillmen. He kept his right hand up his sleeve.

I walked over to Anderson's bed and plucked from under the pillow the sample in the new trade. Jim took it with his left hand before he knew what he was dealing with.

Anderson stepped aside from the lamp. Then Jim knew what he held. He stared. His queue uncoiled from over his forehead and fell down over his shoulders. His hand moved slightly in a convulsive tremor. He sucked his teeth. Then he asked, in a voice devoid of emotion, "Where you catch him?"

"You've got to pass it to a Chink for being a cool customer," said Anderson, as he poured me a drink. "If I had nerves like that I'd own half of China—and part of Connecticut."

"We catch him down Banjermassin way," I answered.

Jim regarded the rusty spots in the hair which looked like blood streaks. He held the head up to the light and examined the brass filling in the teeth.

"You cut him off yourself?"

"Hell, no!" said Anderson. "We buy him already smoked."

"Pretty nice head, Jim."

"Him plitty good," said Jim. He laid the head on the table by the lamp.

Anderson gave me a glance. Jim had us bluffed. We did not know whether he believed the head to be a fraud or the genuine article.

"How much gold you get for this head?" I asked.

Jim looked unblinkingly at the lamp. I knew what he was thinking about—or thought I did. He knew the traffic would be illegal. We could make no trouble if he cheated us. But if he did not play fair there was a good chance we'd find a way to deal with the natives direct and garner his margin of profit along with our own. We had something that would injure the hatchet trade.

"You just catch one?" asked Jim.

"What you pay?" Anderson countered.

"One hundred dolla'."

Anderson picked up the sample head and tossed it back on the bed. Then he filled Jim's glass again.

"Two hundred dolla'."

"When next boat come by this way?" asked Anderson.

"One week she come."

"Then I go." Anderson began wrapping the head in a shirt.

"Three hundred dolla'." said Jim.

"Five hundred dollars," said Anderson.

"Can do," said Jim. He reached into his blouse and brought out a roll of banknotes that would derail a freight train. "When you catch more?" he demanded as he counted out the money.

Anderson looked at me. I knew he wanted to clean up and get out. I nodded to sell the lot. Jim counted out two thousand dollars more and tossed the bills on the table. Anderson pocketed twenty-five hundred dollars and gave Jim the other four heads.

"Short time you catch more, come back here," suggested Jim.

"No can do for this money," said Anderson. "You like, hillmen like, maybe you pay thousand dollars one head."

"Maybe can do, no can tell this time," said Jim. He walked out of the room with his collection of heads in a flour bag.

Anderson split the pile of bills and handed me half, less what the heads had cost. I protested.

"But for you," said Anderson, "I'd never got more than half this. But Jim knows you've been up the Mawa, and knows you've come back to try it again. You stay here, while I go for another lot. I want you on the watch of things—and you're worth it to me."

We had supper sent up to our room. When the boy was out of the way, Anderson opened a small shell-paned shutter at the end of the house, and we had a view of the wall of jungle which rose to the hills overhanging the hotel. We could see across the garden to the flats of the palm grove. It was Jim's night to go to the jungle with hatchets and bring back gold. We put out the lamp.

"We'll just lay doggo and listen," said Anderson. "But we'll play cards in your room and see what we can see."

The flute in the cook shack was silent. Only the hum of distant surf came to our ears, where it broke on the reef that made a harbor before Jim's hotel. There was a soft breeze that brushed the jungle top and the palm mops, striking only at intervals, like a witch's broom.

Jim closed his bar while we played cribbage in my room. A door was open to Anderson's, and the open shutter was beyond. Presently we heard somebody creak along the bamboo of the rear veranda. We moved across so we could look out the open hole in the gable end.

The was a lace of moonlight along the edges of the garden, but in the clearing the light splashed like silver on black velvet. The mango trees and the brush were cut like a wall, green by daylight, but now oozing blackness. What looked like a row of silver buttons toward the palm grove we knew for glass

jugs full of palm toddy hung by rattan loops from bamboos in the trees. The jugs were magnified by the moonlight filtering down through the branches.

We saw a shadow move over the brightness of the open. It was Jim. He carried a parcel in each hand—hatchets in one, heads in the other. Perhaps he had but one head. Jim disappeared into the black velvet.

"Anybody but Jim going up that path tonight would come back headless," said Anderson.

It was a smoothly soft night. Fireflies looped brilliance through the palms down toward the beach. It was a typical tropical night. Death and secret menace in all the beauty, like a poisoned orchid or a jade ring with a venomous needle concealed in an opal.

In a few minutes we heard a clang. I took it for a gong. Then another clang.

"Two hatchets, that's the meaning," whispered Anderson.

"The hillmen are waiting," I agreed.

We heard the cry of a hornbill. It was a headhunter answering Jim. Below, we could hear the soft padding of Chinese feet. Jim's boys were nervous. Anderson and I were the only guests in the place.

"If we had that gong," said Anderson, "we could use it in going up the river, to trade direct."

"Hanf told me that it's a drum, laced loosely, and a tin can under the head, with the head made from a white man's hide. That's a special drum, given Jim so there can be no mistake about who's talking."

"We could use it, I say," persisted Anderson.

"You'll know less when you've been here longer, Anderson. Take your time, and let's see how things work out."

IN HALF an hour we saw the shadow that was Jim come out of the path of the jungle into the palm grove. He then crossed the clearing of the onion garden. By the time he reached the back veranda, we heard a drum boom twice, not far away. This was no clang, but the low and deep-throated roar of the hill drums. It shook the air of the jungles like a twin explosion.

Boom!

Then interval enough to let the echoes clear and the vibrations die out in the distance.

Boom!

"Two heads," I whispered to Anderson. "Now, listen, and we'll hear from the hills. I want you to hear the news that two heads are coming home. I've heard it before—when I went up the Mawa with Bannister and McLaw and came back alone."

The hills began talking. Life throbbed through them as drum after drum, far up in the passes toward the head waters of the Mawa River, began to pass the word of triumph.

"So that means heads," said Anderson.

"White men's heads. The party that came down with gold for hatchets has heads—two of them."

"That means money in our pockets," said Anderson.

"Jim knows his business. At this time of year, the young bloods of the tribes want heads in pairs. Hear it! *Two, two!*"

"I thought he'd only take one as a sample," said Anderson, as he lit the lamp and closed the shell-paned shutter.

"He knows how they want 'em—everything in twos."

"When will he get his gold?"

"Next trip. But I'll bet they come tomorrow night. They'll bring plenty of gold, and want another pair. No waiting a week with the hillmen when heads can be picked up."

The air still shook with the distant throbbing. The drum which he had heard close at hand was receding. We slept that night while the drums hummed far away like an angry hive of bees. All night they talked. By daylight they were silent.

Jim was pottering about the bar when

we went down for breakfast. His yellow face revealed suppressed elation, and his black eyes snapped in the morning sunlight. None of us mentioned the night's business, nor did we admit that the drums had any bearing on it.

The next night repeated. Jim went to the jungle and the drums talked. Next morning Jim avoided Anderson and myself.

"He's afraid we'll see in his eyes how rich he got. If things were not up to his expectations, we'd hear plenty of beefing. He's mopped up."

"Probably a bucket of nuggets," I remarked.

The third night Jim disappeared at his usual time. We saw him cross the garden. He carried a sack with him. He thumped his slack drum as usual, the hornbill answered from the jungle, and presently the drums began to talk. But we missed the double strokes. No more did they say *two, two,* but *one, one.* It was like the tolling of a bell, then other bells, and the drumming lacked the fire, the exaltation, the frenzy of the previous nights.

"What's wrong?" asked Anderson, as we stood by the open shutter, listening.

"Jim delivered only one head."

"That's so. He gave 'em two for two nights, but the last of the five he's got, cleaned him out. Well, I'll be back in about a month with a new supply. We've got a lively market."

"Listen!"

The drum of the hillmen who was doing the trading with Jim, began a new tattoo. The hill drums fell silent. Then the nearby drum in the jungle began a series of irregular beating. A single drum from the hills answered.

"What's that?" asked Anderson.

"Calling 'em in," I interpreted.

"That's right," agreed Anderson. "The drum that was close is going up the hills toward the passes."

Soon the hill drums were silent. We heard a few remarks from the drums of the party taking home Jim's last head.

"Looks to me," I said, "as if the hillmen were set for a double wedding tonight, expecting two heads. Jim disappointed 'em."

"We'll get better prices on the next lot," said Anderson.

"Strong demand, rising quotations, and the ticker running behind," I laughed. "Factories behind in orders."

"Business booming," retorted Anderson with a chuckle. "You can hear it boom. Little quiet tonight, but wait until we hear what our customer's man has got to say."

"You mean Jim."

"That's the guy. He's going to cry yellow tears because his supply of heads has run out."

"The hillmen can wait. Jim can tell 'em plenty more heads—and run his own price up," I suggested.

"Gives us a chance to find out just how bad Jim wants more heads—and how much the hillmen will pay. Here's where we show where the profit is, so—"

"Lay off! That's Jim on the back porch, now."

We heard padded shoes pounding along over the springy split bamboo flooring. Presently Jim could be heard coming up the stairs. He stopped just long enough to put something in his cast iron safe before he headed our way.

We were back at our cribbage game by the time Jim reached my door. I let him in, pretending astonishment at seeing him.

"Hello, Jim!" said Anderson. "Come up for a real drink."

Jim Sing wiped sweat from his brow. "Can do. Very nice thanks. Plenty wa'm night."

Anderson poured a glass full of the Dutch brown syrup.

"Not so many drums tonight, Jim," I remarked.

The old Chinese swung his eyes to me, appraisingly, if he wondered if I knew what the drums meant, and their liveliness since he began delivering heads.

"Mo' better. Too damn much drum-noise," said Jim. He drank with the swift gulp of a man in a hurry.

"Not a good time to try and sell heads, Jim, when the tribes are celebrating in the hills," said Anderson.

"Me want one mo' head," said Jim.

"What! You think I've more with me! Why, I'll catch the schooner tomorrow to go for more."

"One mo' head," said Jim. The glitter of greed was in his eyes.

"I sold you all I've got," insisted Anderson.

"One mo' head."

"You mean you've sold out."

"One mo' head."

"No can do."

"One mo' head."

"Look here!" said Anderson sharply. "If you think I've held heads out on you to run up the price, you hunt through my room and my baggage." He waved an arm in the direction of his room.

Jim held out his glass for another drink. "Short time you come back, mo' head?" he asked.

"In a month. But I can only bring you five again. I want to supply some other customers on other islands."

"You bring me fifty this side. Can do."

ANDERSON shook his head dolefully. "Not at the price you've paid me for this first lot. I'm disappointed, Jim, in this place as a market. If I bring you more than six, I'll have to get more money."

"Can do," said Jim. "One mo' head, two t'ousan' dolla' now tonight, this time." He pulled out his roll of banknotes.

"No got," said Anderson.

Finally, Jim believed us. He rose sadly and departed from us. We heard him unlocking his cast iron safe to put his roll to bed for the night. The key was rusty and the hinges creaked. Jim never oiled either key or hinges. The creaking of the metal when the safe was opened provided an automatic burglar alarm, for Jim slept in the same room with his safe. It was an old ship's safe, with chains and turnbuckles for securing it to the deck, and Jim had it securely anchored in cement under the floor.

Next, we heard him talking Chinese to the cook, the gardener and the bar boy in the cook shack. Presently the blind man, who played the flute for Jim, struck up a tune, and Anderson and I returned to our card game.

I listened to the flute. "That tune," I remarked, "is always played when Jim has made a good collection. It has something to do with his return to China."

"He certainly wanted that other head he thought I had," said Anderson.

We took a shot of the Dutch syrup and turned in.

It must have been three o'clock when I heard something that waked me. Anderson got out of bed, and I went in to ask him what he had heard. He opened the shell shutter, and we looked out into the moonlit garden.

"*Pung-g!*"

I grabbed Anderson and threw him away from the shutter into the middle of the room. Then I slammed the shell-paned shutter.

"Blow gun!" I cried. "Did you feel anything sting you?"

"I heard what you heard, but you didn't see what I saw," replied Anderson. He was fumbling frantically under his mosquito netting in the darkness. I turned on the flashlight I did not want to use while the shutter was open, and saw Anderson back away from his bed with an automatic in each hand. He made for the shutter.

"Don't shoot out that window!" I cried.

"Shut off that light! Jim must've told the hillmen I've heads in my room—the whole damned building is swarming with natives!"

I rushed to my room and flashed the light long enough to get my automatics.

"The veranda!" cried Anderson. "That's where they are!"

"Don't open your door, Anderson!"

But I was too late with my warning. Anderson wrung the rattan-secured latch open. Moonlight in irregular splotches swept in on the floor, strained through the vines growing up the veranda stanchions. But the triangular patch of spotted light did not hold Anderson—he was flat on a dark part of the floor. And he was firing by the time I saw him.

Brown men with hatchets were on the veranda. It was swarming with them. We caught their outlines in the filigree of moonlight through the vines. I let go with both guns, along with Anderson's blasting. Then I fired into the rafters, for a native was hacking at the thatch to get through that way to us.

It was short, sharp work. We threw no lead away. Men fell with hatchets, we heard the hollow sound of bamboo guns as they dropped, and from the cook shack there came a shrill squeal. It was the blind flute player, I knew. He was asking what was wrong. But he did not continue his Chinese questions.

As we refilled our magazine pistols, we heard fleeting feet across the stubble near the garden and the hacking of hatchets. The hillmen were saving the heads of their dead on the ground near the stoop under the upper veranda. We heard the death chant, and the groans of the dying. Out of these sounds we caught the yelps of agony from wounded who were to lose their heads.

Anderson rose from the matting. With his pistols loaded again, he charged across bodies athwart the open door. He kicked dead men into the vines of the veranda. I dropped down the stairs and fired into the mass of men intent now upon getting heads.

Anderson came down, careful against ambush. But the hillmen were already in flight. We saw them crossing the garden in the moonlight, and fired to hasten their going. Then we ran through the bar for the back of the house.

"Jim!" I yelled. "Jim Sing!" From the back veranda I saw a naked figure flee from the open cook shack door and dive into the jungle. It was there that the cook and the gardener and the blind flute player would make for concealment. Anderson came blundering along in the blackness of the passage after me.

"Where's Jim? Did he answer?"

"They've all skipped for the brush," I answered. "We've got to clear that cook shack of natives!" I ran along the pebbled walk. The hillmen always set fires after an attack, and the leafy structure would go swiftly and the hotel might burn.

As I reached the shadow of the smaller building, I heard Anderson calling for me. "Come back! Jim's here!"

Assured that Jim was not dead, I persisted in making sure no natives lurked in the cook shack. I looked through the open *kajang*. The moonlight struck inside on the floor in a twisted square of brilliance.

I saw four dead bodies on the packed coral floor—the bar boy, the gardener, the cook, and the poor blind flute player, his flute clutched to his blood-stained chest. The heads of all were missing. The hillmen were all gone.

I ran back to the hotel. Anderson had a lamp burning in the little room off the bar where Jim Sing kept his safe. Now the open *kajang* gleamed yellowly against the outer moonlight. As I entered from the passage Anderson was lighting a cigarette. He threw his head back and shook the powder-bittered sweat from his eyes.

"Where's Jim?" I demanded. "I thought you said—"

"I said he was here—so he is. He wanted one more head for the hillmen—they got it." He swung a hand toward the rattan cot beyond the safe. I saw Jim Sing there—headless.

"Your factory-made heads are great civilizers," I began, "but—"

Drums crashed not far away in the jungle. Anderson cocked his head to listen to the peculiar rolling of the throbs, followed by a double booming—*two—two—two.*

"What do they say?" asked Anderson.

I WAS already started for the stairs under full steam. "They say," I called after me, "that there are two more heads here to be picked up for a song—white men's heads! Get going!"

We dressed and grabbed for our bags while the drums talked. We made for the beach. It would be safer among the palm trees with the sea to our backs. I led the way to the boat beach. Anderson made good time for all his fatness. There were youngsters in the jungle who had failed to get heads and they would take big chances to make a clean job of the night's work.

As we reached the canoes we turned and saw naked figures flitting through the shadows of the hotel's veranda. Hatchets hacked. Then a spurt of red flame lifted from the dry vines and the low-hanging thatch caught fire. We watched Jim Sing's hotel burn to the chatter of a thousand drums and the popping of bamboo exploding from the heat.

"I've learned something tonight," said Anderson, as he leaned against a palm tree and took a swig from his Dutch bottle.

"What's that?" I asked, hunting the lightest canoe.

"I'll always deliver even numbers of heads. We lost Jim because his last delivery was only a single head. No wonder he wanted one mo' head."

"The more some people have, the more they want."

"You mean the natives?"

"Yes—and Jim—and ourselves. Come on! Bear a hand here to get this canoe into the water. We'd better do our waiting for that schooner out on the bay."

"O.K.," said Anderson. "There's a fine market ruined just because I didn't have another head for Jim. We could have got a couple of thousand."

We thrust the canoe into the water and got aboard. Anderson picked up his paddle. "Better luck next time."

Boom-boom! said the jungle drums. And the hill drums answered *boom-boom!* Meaning, Fetch home the other two. *Boom-boom!*

Captain Frederick Moore, author, world traveler, and adventurer of much thrilling experience, gives us again in the August ADVENTURE a swift and gripping story of the headhunters.

BACK TRAIL

By

AUBREY BOYD

A Story of the Great White North—and the Perfect Crime

NEAR THE foot of the gulch, with his snowshoes sunk in drift, Colter waited wearily for an encounter he no longer hoped nor wished to avoid. A carbine dangled unheeded at his arm. He carried it by some forgetfulness of habit and fatigue, for the gun was useless. The backfiring shot that wrecked it had disabled his hand, giving reprieve to a stray caribou and cancelling his last hope of food in a region hunted by famished wolves. Still he had trailed on, until the certainty that the same fangs would soon be snarling over his own body brought him to a halt.

Beleaguered as he was, the human pursuit behind him had a backward lure. It offered food and warmth—a margin for the play of chance which had often served him in extremity. And while he knew the doom of the trail, he did not know the exact degree of the peril from which he was in flight.

Dusk was closing over the Babine. Only a pallid light glanced along the ridges, illumining them with gleams that made the cold more bitter and desolate. Below the white headlands, patches of spruce bristled in blue shadow like tufts of fur on a worn and frosted pelt. The fugitive's eyes were intent on the nearest wooded area at the base of the ravine.

From the edge of the forest gloom he watched a dark line sever itself and move toward him—a dog team in single harness. Its lone driver was breaking trail for the dogs along the clearly marked track. Furs covered a scarlet coat without obscuring from Colter the officer who had tried to stop him near French Louie's cabin on the Skeena. To meet with an agent of justice in that far wilderness had been unexpected. It was not many years since the new police outfit was first banded, in '84; nor had

any of the service to Colter's knowledge, appeared before in British Columbia north of the upper Caribou.

At close range, the order came to drop the carbine and raise his hands.

Colter obeyed. In a curious numbed quietude he saw the handcuffs fastened on his wrists, and heard the warrant spoken by Corporal Rankin of the Northwest Mounted, whose labored breath smoked into the cold.

"Arresting you on the charge of robbing and killing the prospector, Dan McGrath, near the Skeena, last December."

Colter scowled at him, silently taking the measure of the man and his gear. He was young. His face, haggard from strain, lacked the weather marks of a veteran or the impersonal mask of routine. The dogs, a train of four Manitoba huskies with a wolfish malamute leader, had evidently been hard driven. His sled seemed lightly freighted for the long trip back.

Raising thoughtful eyes from the damaged carbine to his prisoner, Rankin returned the scrutiny.

"Out of grub long?"

"Two days."

"We'll have to camp here, then."

The policeman chose the shelter of a nearby cliff strewn at the base with dead timber drift.

There, while the dogs were being unhitched, Colter bent down to rub his injured wrist in the snow. Challenged, he pulled off a mitten with his teeth and showed the discolored hand, slightly frozen by the cramp of the steel.

"You might as well leave off these bangles," he complained. "The way I'm fixed, I'd be crazy to make a break."

Rankin unlocked them. "If you make a doubtful move now," he said in sober warning, "it's lead that will freeze you."

Clear of the manacles, Colter gathered some driftwood and lighted it. The fire's warmth and the assurance of food gave him a slight glow of reviving confidence. There couldn't be any ground but suspicion, he reflected, for the charge against him. He had come up the Skeena from the coast that fall with some .45-.70 carbines and traded them illegally for furs among the Kiksans, as Rankin might have learned from Louie, the trapper. A sufficient reason for avoiding the Law. But McGrath's murder was another affair. Neither Louie nor any Indian could have found or guessed the peculiar spot where the prospector's bones lay hidden. Anyone chancing on it, or daring to approach it—and this was his most cherished secret—would have been confounded by the relics the wolves had left. The murder was conviction-proof.

None the less he felt the chill now of vague portent, an uneasiness he could not account for until his gaze drifted from Rankin and the sled into the dusk beyond. The light seemed suddenly to have failed. To the northeast he saw a nebulous mist blurring the ridges. It was not very perceptible; Rankin apparently had not noticed it, intent on dividing scraps of food among the hungry dogs. That meagre feeding gave another twinge to Colter's foreboding, which became more acute when the officer brought to the fire a thin shank of bacon, some frozen beans in a flour sack, a frying pan and two tin plates.

"Short rations," he said. "I hung on your trail a bit too long."

Colter's lips twisted sardonically, but he was too engrossed in the cooking to answer. When the food was hot Rankin gave him the greater portion of it, with a generosity that made him quizzical, famished as he was.

"To make sure of keeping me alive?" he muttered.

"I wouldn't like to make that trip with a dead man."

The prisoner deliberated this as he ate, curbing his hunger.

"Sure you'll get out alive yourself?" he asked after a moment.

Rankin looked at him narrowly across the fire.

"What's that? A threat?"

"Not by me," Colter mumbled. "Look."

Following the direction of his pointed fork to the deepening gloom in the north, Rankin's eyes puckered dubiously. "A storm, eh? You think—?"

"Figure it out," Colter said, raking up the last shreds of food with care, and licking his fork. "This late in March blizzards have a bad trick of lasting. Then there'll be loose snow. You're short of grub now, and you won't have a marked trail back to Louie's cabin."

"The dogs can pick up the back trail from memory," Rankin frowned.

"Supposing they can eat each other and still trail. Ever eat dog?"

"It won't come to that."

"No?" Colter queried dryly.

THE PALL of mist was lowering with ominous speed. Suddenly the fire flattened and the cliff darkened under a gust from above. There was a tinkle of lapsing snow from the rocks; the air tingled with needle points, and almost without further warning, the storm crashed over them, swirling from the black ridges like the scud from gigantic wave crests.

Rankin hurried to the sled and pulled it at an angle for a wind break. The dogs had already cringed in close to the cliff and lay curled there with their hind legs snugged over their noses. Coming back to the fire with a caribou sleeping bag and some furs, the officer stood in the light, staring somberly into the dark welter of the canyon, as if he only now caught the full force of Colter's prediction. The blizzard was closing around them like a death sheet.

"Tough break for the Law," mocked the prisoner. "The case goes to the wolves. Which will do us full justice."

Rankin's gaze returned to him in curious study. "A poetic kind of justice for you, perhaps."

"Meaning what?"

"The judgment that rhymes a man's finish with what he's done. Pays him in his own coin, or lets the crime avenge itself, a sort of echo."

"If that jingle was true," Colter gibed, "the Law could quit. It's like the other wheeze about the haunted killer's always returning to the scene of the crime. If it worked, you'd camp on the spot instead of trailing him."

"The man who put McGrath's body where I found it," Rankin mused, "wouldn't have a conscience."

Colter threw him a keen glance. "Where you found it? Do you unwind the mystery or am I meant to die curious?"

"I'll explain it. I want to be sure in my own mind that the charge is true, in case it never comes to trial. You can say that you dodged arrest because of your lawless gun trading."

"Right," Colter agreed. "Not a serious crime, though."

"It's serious enough. The Kiksans are a primitive, untamed tribe, and could do a lot of mischief. You knew that the Law bans the sale of repeating firearms to Indians."

"Didn't figure the Law reached north of the Frazer," said Colter. Other questions put to him by Rankin he answered with little reserve. He had happened on the remote cabin in the wilds near the Babine fork where Louie the trapper lived with a squaw, and had found Louie's knowledge of furs and natives useful. When the trading was finished, bad trails compelled him to wait for Spring and for easier freighting to the coast on the open river. The delay was tiresome. Louie was a dull simpleton with the ideas of a Siwash and his squaw was not a tempting diversion. Time had dragged until, toward Christmas, the trapper mentioned that he was expecting a visit from the prospector, McGrath.

This prospector, the only other white man in the region, was working some hidden placer source to the north. Each

Christmas he made a long journey southward by dog team, sledding out his gold takings to the 150 Mile House on the Caribou Trail, where he weighed in the dust and spent the rest of the winter. It was McGrath's custom to pick up the trapper's catch of furs on the way, and exchange them for supplies at the distant post.

"And after leaving Louie's cabin this December," supplied Rankin, "he was never seen again."

"You haven't proved yet that he was murdered," Colter said evenly. "A lone traveler can disappear in this kind of country easy enough without help."

"That was the impression when he didn't turn up at the roadhouse. I got my first news there of his disappearance. There wasn't a suspicion of foul play. Your presence in the region wasn't known."

"How'd you come to look for him?" Colter questioned.

"I was on my way north to make an Indian survey. The keeper of the roadhouse told me that McGrath usually called at Louie's cabin on his way out, and I thought I might cross his trail somewhere between the Quesnel and the Skeena.

"Above La Hache, I searched along several routes he might have taken without finding a trace. Late one night I was looking for a place to camp. I chose a place near the edge of a thick stand of hemlock, and in a swale well sheltered by bedded boulders, one of those weird formations like ruins of some ancient design. The dogs probably chose it for me, with the sense they have for a place that's been used as a camp before. When I made my fire, I found the ashes of another under the snow. There was a remnant of what looked like burned deerskin, but nothing to show whether the fire had been McGrath's.

"I was cooking supper when the dogs started growling and bristling at something in the nearby timber. There was a slight stir in the wood. Through the darkness I saw two yellow eyes shining in the fire gleam. A wolf had apparently been attracted by the smell of food, but so bold an approach by a lone wolf made me curious. I lit a firebrand and went toward it. It vanished, and in a few minutes raised a long desolate howl. I traced it into the timber with a pine bough for light, and came unexpectedly upon a small open space in the close-grown stand, dimly lighted from above by the break in the trees. In the center of the open was a shadowy frame, like a large box on stilts of dead saplings. Seen closer, the wood was old, and the stilting had collapsed on one side.

"I knew that the Kiksans use a structure of this kind to cache the body of a dead conjurer or medicine man, instead of giving it burial or burning. The Haidas on the sea coast put the sorcerer's death hut on some rocky point of the shore, but the Wood Indians, or Sticks of the interior, raise a coffin on stilts to be out of the reach of prowling wolves. Sometimes they place it in a forked tree. And ever afterwards they avoid the spot in fear of the spirits that are thought to hover around it.

"Evidently this was what I had come upon. A large hole showed at the base of the crumbled box, which was empty of what it had once contained. Wolves couldn't have reached it, but hungry wolverines will gnaw through almost anything. I looked in the snow beneath, expecting to find no bones under a ruin so old. However, I did find the wolf's track and a hollowed place where it had been digging. Scooping away the snow, my hand touched some bones. That was queer so I went back for a lantern and spade.

"The relics I uncovered were fragments of a human skeleton. Their shallow depth in snow proved that they couldn't be those of the original sorcerer. The wolf's interest in them also indicated a recent death. The skull, intact,

had high, broad cheekbones, like an Indian's. That, and the absence of any sign of clothing, weapon or gear, and the place itself, put McGrath out of my mind at the time.

"The remains had a much more likely explanation. To make sure, I wrapped up the skull—the wolves had made wreckage of the rest—and took it to the nearest village of the Kiksans. They keep close account of their tribesmen, so that one clan can claim indemnity from another. Certainly no ordinary Indian would dare venture near that conjurer's death place. But there was one possible exception. I showed the skull to the tyee and his council and told where I'd found it."

RANKIN smiled slightly. "It was hard to make them talk. But I learned that one Indian, and only one, had disappeared that winter. They spoke of him with reluctance and respect. He was a young mystic named Eagle Feather. Half crazy, no doubt, and therefore honored. He'd wanted to become a sorcerer. To test his powers, native custom had forced him to go away alone in the wilderness, naked, though the snow was already deep, weaponless and without food, to meet the visions and spirits that confuse the mind in the last stages of cold and famine. Tradition required him to keep a vigil at the burial place of a former wizard. When he failed to return, it was concluded that the spirits of the former had been too much for him.

"So Eagle Feather was dead beyond a doubt; his bones had a wolves' secret. No Indian dared search for him in any of the haunted places where he might have died. Though the Indians couldn't identify the skull, they believed it to be Eagle Feather's. And that seemed to cover the case."

"Seemed to?" Colter demanded as Rankin paused. "What's wrong with it?"

"Only one thing. In clear daylight, I looked the skull over and found a bullet imbedded in the base of the skull. A body shot, apparently, had struck a bone and glanced upward into the skull, where the bullet flattened. It was of heavy calibre. But I kept it from the natives' sight. For the bullet smashed the illusion that the bones were Eagle Feather's, and showed that this was a case of murder by a white man, with McGrath as the only possible victim."

Colter was silent a long time. "How do you know?"

"No one had disappeared that winter except McGrath and the Indian. There was a clear motive for McGrath's murder, but none for the killing of an unarmed and starving conjurer."

"Supposing it was McGrath?" Colter objected. "The Indians had high-powered carbines. What proves a white man killed him?"

"The place were the body was hid, as well as the absence of an Indian motive. No Siwash would go near that spot, least of all to conceal a murdered body. In fact, their fear of it made it an ideal hiding place for a white man's crime.

"Now McGrath's murderer had to use extreme caution. It was necessary to conceal the body against the remotest danger of discovery and recognition. The sled could be burned. The dogs could be scattered at a distance to revert to wild, as they would have done had McGrath been fatally lost in a storm. But the body couldn't be buried in the frozen ground. And if left just anywhere in obscure cover for the wolves to destroy, some Indian, or Louie, chancing on the bones, would notice they were recent. Eagle Feather's disappearance suggested to the murderer his almost perfect scheme of deception.

"The death box was broken, and looked like a cache. Some searcher other than Louie or the natives, might find it and peer inside, and the corpse might have remained recognizable for some time in the cold. But left on the ground,

wolves would strip it, and Eagle Feather's disappearance would mask its identity should it ever be found.

"But there's always a flaw in the 'perfect' crime. The glancing bullet spoiled the illusion; it made a complete giveaway. Nakedness and the absence of a weapon fitted Eagle Feather, but for McGrath it ruled out the possibility of suicide or accidental death. Then there was that wolf."

"Sent by the higher justice to steer you?" Colter queried.

"Maybe. It turned out to be a wild dog. I thought it was a stray from some Siwash camp, but the Indians didn't recognize it, and I believe now it was McGrath's. No doubt his own dogs were used to haul his body to the hiding place, then to haul the gold to where it was cached. Afterwards they were scattered. One of them, though, seems to have returned to the place where it last saw its master."

"And it a wild malamute?" sneered Colter. He snorted. "The gap in your proof is that McGrath might have stumbled into that haunted place, killed Eagle Feather, and then done a fade-out to dodge you. For a motive, I've heard of these mad and starving conjurers going cannibal sometimes in the bush. Natives have showed me scars from their bites. Proud of it, too. McGrath likely wouldn't take it so kind and might shoot."

Rankin stared at him deliberatively. "That would be your line of defense?"

"Why not?" grimaced Colter. "You haven't got a case till you prove the bones wasn't the Siwash's. I don't figure you can. Not that it matters a whole lot. Your higher chief justice in the sky is throwing you a blank hand anyhow, by snowing up your back trail."

" 'He moves in mysterious ways.' "

"Mysterious, you say. He shuffles blind and deals the luck as it comes to any hand, just or unjust. Give me even the makings of a stack, and I could bust His game easy."

Rankin was silent. Colter yawned and grinned.

But before Colter slept, Rankin relocked his wrists—a precaution at which Colter grunted in derision.

DAWN broke with an unexpected slacking in the blizzard's drive. Both men watched it fatefully. Rankin looked unrested and cold; the prisoner, without a a need for vigilance, had slept soundly. It was an advantage that might count for much if the storm's waning tune continued.

By midday the fall had ceased. Though the ravines were deeply smothered in loose snow, a keen wind, glazing the surface, decided Rankin to break camp next morning. Colter saw the ordeal before them as a contest of endurance which he had more than a chance of winning.

When the dogs were harnessed, Rankin ordered him to break trail, a job which one of them would have to do.

"You can't travel in handcuffs," the corporal explained, "and I'd rather have you in front."

"Suits me," said Colter agreeably, and asked for two strips of rawhide. Attaching these to the snowshoes, he brought them in winding loops on his forearms, to help lift the shoes out of the drift as he walked, and to relieve the strain of the thongs on his ankles.

From the outset, their progress was a punishing struggle. The snow carried the lightly freighted toboggan well enough, but gave the men no footing. The dogs, floundering belly deep, moved in fractious jerks that threw the heavier toil on Rankin. They battled till dark for a few miles of headway, then camped; and after scant food and rest, dragged on into another dawn.

Now, although the snow had packed more firmly, the starved and weary team rebelled. More than once, when the huskies sagged or snarled under the whip, it was only the steady pull of the

hunger-hardened malamute that kept them moving. Colter was impressed by the native leader's sure sense of direction. On the back trail, the dog was better than a compass—a fact to be remembered.

Rankin limped painfully into their second camp. He unstrapped his snowshoes and removed the service boots to bind his feet. They were swollen and bleeding from the remorseless chafing of the shoe thongs. The prisoner smiled grimly for he knew all the stages of snowshoe torture; how swiftly it could ravage the strength of iron men, even without the added drain of famine; how surely it hastened exhaustion and its first symptom, forgetfulness.

He bided his time. Though their dwindled remnant of food was hardly enough to carry one man to the Skeena, and he began to doubt his own power to hold out much longer against hunger, cold and weariness, he was patient—with the tenacious patience of the wolf. In this strained, silent conflict, tacitly recognized by both, a bungling move on his part might draw the quick response of a bullet.

But the end came suddenly. They were straggling down a canyon bed, the dogs ready to drop at the first slack of command. Looking back, Colter saw Rankin leaning in an odd posture on the push stick, as he followed the sled. The man's unshaven face, icicled by his breath and raw with frost scabs, seemed to be glazed over by frozen sweat. The sled lurched abruptly sidelong on an icy hummock, and the stick whipped out of Rankin's grasp. He fell heavily on the ice.

The summons shot like fire through Colter's brain. He ran stumbling back. Rankin lay insensible.

Slipping the revolver from the officer's holster, Colter found the handcuffs and locked his wrists.

Rankin stirred feebly and made a vain effort to rise. His feet, unresponsive in the snowshoes, were frozen. There was blood on his lips. He dazedly tried to raise his hands; then looked at the shackles, unable at once to understand what had happened. When he did, his eyes found Colter's with a look which might have troubled many men.

"I'm done," he murmured thickly. "But this won't help you."

Colter's voice sounded far and strange in his own ears. "You don't figure I'm going to sled you to your headquarters and give myself up?"

"It's your best chance. If you can make it."

"Don't make me laugh. You're a dead man."

Rankin's eyes fell vaguely on the revolver he was holding.

"Wrong," said Colter. "I don't need to shoot you. Or hide you, either. The frost is in your lungs right now. You'll be found with your sled, frozen where you fell. Unless the wolves get you, or your own dogs when they gnaw free. No bullets this time, or tell-tale signs."

"I was right," murmured Rankin. "You did kill McGrath."

"That'll be your secret," Colter taunted. "If the set-up wasn't perfect before, it is now. See any flaw in it."

"Yes," Rankin murmured, weakly leaning on his hands.

"Where's the catch?" Colter sneered.

A choked sound came from Rankin's throat, as if he called back his voice by a last exertion of will. The words were hardly audible. "You'll pay, Colter. You forgot something—before. You're forgetting—something—now."

Then his arms no longer upheld him and he slumped down in the snow.

Colter frowned reflectively, then left him there and turned to the sled, for the remainder of the food. He ate it uncooked and lay down in a covering of furs to rest.

The cold wakened him some hours later. Rankin was frozen dead. Colter removed the handcuffs and restored them to the pocket of the uniform. The revolver he carefully returned to the po-

liceman's holster. Perhaps a needless precaution, but Rankin's last word about forgetfulness had put him on his guard. He searched and found no written report on McGrath's murder. He made up a light pack of the remaining food and some furs. There was little else in the sled, except the sleeping bag and trail gear, his broken carbine, which could safely be left where it was, and a black leather bag.

He untied the neck of the bag with clumsy fingers, and was startled when a skull rolled out into the snow. It lay there grinning at him.

Colter examined it curiously, without a qualm; even with a conscious pride in being undisturbed by this stark souvenir. He decided that the safest course was to take it with him and sink it in the river at the break-up.

Then he unhitched the wheel dog from the team, killed it with a hunting knife, dressed and quartered the carcass, and throwing the refuse to the dogs, placed the meat in a pack sack. With the remaining dogs he pulled the sled alongside Rankin's body, which he managed to topple into it as if the corporal had fallen there. He wedged the sled between the hummock of a niggerhead and a protruding root, so that it was anchored by the obstruction.

Finally he detached the lead dog to take with him as a guide in case his own sense of direction should fail, and also to share his pack. He linked the dog to him with another rawhide line which he fastened to his belt.

He looked back at the dead officer in the sled, and the whining dogs. The picture was perfect; or would be so as soon as another snowfall covered his tracks. Nothing had been forgotten. He checked over each detail again. Satisfied at last, he called up the malamute and resumed the trail.

Soon he was walking into a light drizzle of snow, the final touch he needed to make his security complete. It lasted for an hour or two without impeding him, except that the blurring of the flakes made him sleepy. From time to time he stumbled out of a waking drowse to find the dog pulling steadily ahead, and insensibly left the trail to its choosing.

Being within a day of Louie's cabin, he thought it safer to make the distance, if he could, without stopping to camp. He felt more sleepy than tired; the lighthearted sense of escape giving place to a not unpleasant lightness in his head, now that he had nothing to think about.

How far he traveled before dark he was unaware; nor did he take much count of his position until his snowshoes started bumping in some strange recurrent dips. He found that the dog had led him off their course along the lumbering track of a moose. Unwilling to camp before he regained the back trail, he fed the dog, and headed it in what he thought was the right direction.

THE NIGHT was bitter cold, but clear. A moon had risen and a sharp wind was blowing spray from the weighted timber. Moonlight sparkled on the crusted snow, now so firm that his snowshoes hardly left a mark. Deep timber shadows closed around him. Now, however, he had a vaguely assured sense of being in remembered country. They traversed a thick grown wood, where the wind hadn't packed the drifts and the going was slow and obstructed. This, too, he seemed to remember, as he dimly followed the dog.

He came into a lighter area where the moon's rays fell in mystic lacing through the gloom. The dog was leading him to a weirdly stilted frame, with a dark square shape atop of it masked in snow. Colter stopped cold. A protesting murmur broke from him. It was the conjurer's death cache, where he'd hidden McGrath's body. He tried to tell himself that he was deluded, but the structure did not vanish. Far gone though he was, he hadn't yet been

troubled by visions or queer delusions.

He looked at the dog in clouded question. And then his mind was pierced by the sudden remembrance that Rankin had found a wild dog at this place, McGrath's dog hitched into the police team for evidence. It had returned him to the spot by a circle as wide as his flight. Colter chortled aloud in defiance and relief. He was no easy prey to conscience, and he wasn't lost. On the contrary, he now had a fixed landmark to steer from.

He turned to retrace his way, but a moan from the darkness checked him. It sent prickles of ice through his chilled blood. Wind in the trees, no doubt; the dog wasn't heeding it. But his eyes swiveled around against his will, and his heart froze. He saw a gaunt, naked, silvered figure standing in a beam of moonlight near the pile, staring at him with eyes that burned in bleak hollows. McGrath was dead. But was Eagle Feather dead? He had never seen the Siwash's bones. He was defenseless, without a gun, and if this was the mad Indian conjurer—?

The figure started moving silently toward him. Colter made an abrupt retreat, tripped on the dog's lead line and fell with it in a snarling and clawing tangle. His frantic attempt to rise was baffled by the clumsy snowshoes. He drew his knife—then suddenly the smother cleared. The dog had torn free of its tether and disappeared. The Indian had also vanished. Colter did not pause to reason over this. Regaining his feet, he tore headlong through the wood and into the open snow.

Running and falling, and rising again, he was halted by sheer exhaustion before he had a lucid thought. He cursed his folly for risking a fatal sweat for nothing. There wasn't a chance of Eagle Feather's being alive.

This wouldn't do. He collected his drowsing senses to defeat the real danger of wandering and sleep. Louie's cabin was far distant, but he remembered a Kiksan village, not very far along the margin of the timber. He pushed on, guided now by a line from which he could hardly stray, though he was sensible of little more.

He had a last impression of wood smoke, a glow in the forest and a circle of swarthy firelit faces as he fell and sank into sleep, sure of having won refuge and escape from every danger.

The fire was burning red in the dawn when his sense returned. He was standing naked before it in a strangely cramped attitude, with his arms behind him. They were lashed around the trunk of a tree. He frowned dazedly into the masklike faces of the headman of the village and his men, whose eyes had an accusing glitter.

"*Klahowya,*" he muttered. "Why is this?"

The tyee answered.

"You kill Eagle Feather."

"Me?" queried Colter blankly. "Kill Eagle Feather? *Nada!*"

The headman produced that fatal skull of McGrath's. An appalled glimmer of understanding dawned on Colter as he listened. They had found the skull in his pack. They had seen it before—when the corporal showed them what he had found at the conjurer's death cache. They knew of Colter's flight to the north.

"*Cultus wawa!*" Colter protested. "You've got this all wrong."

But here he was checked by a dilemma. To pretend to Indians that McGrath had killed Eagle Feather would be fatal. They had peculiar ideas of vengeance, and would take his life, as a white man, to pay for an Indian's. His only course was to tell the truth. The murder of one white man by another would mean nothing to them. Released and with the break-up near, he could reach the coast before the confession was heard of in the Caribou.

"It is McGrath's head," he said boldly. "I killed him and hid him in that place to fool the white Law."

Stolid unbelief answered him. "Show

a sign that this is true talk," the headman challenged.

Colter stood at a loss, in the tightening grip of fear. He could not prove it. He had destroyed every trace of McGrath except the gold, which was no different from any man's gold. The deception was too strong to be explained away before Indian judges, and the false charge was deadly. This was what he'd forgotten, what the corporal must have foreseen.

His distracted gaze fell on some ugly sharpened stakes that had been thrust into the fire coals; and he remembered now with horror the torture practiced by Kiksans.

"The white Law will hang you for this!" he cried out.

"We have heard the Law of the redcoat chief," said the tyee. "A killer must die; Siwash, white man, the same."

"Give me to the white Law for judgment," was Colter's desperate answer, "or the redcoat chief will bring death on you!"

"The chief of the white Law is dead," said the Indian impassively. "My men saw his dogs."

He gave a grim command to two of the armed tribesmen.

"You can't do it, I tell you!" panted Colter, writhing at bonds, and losing the Chinook words in his terror. "You can't torture me for what I didn't do. There's no rhyme or reason—" But in his whirling brain those words had a haunted echo that silenced him.

That and the fearful penalty he was about to pay whispered to him the prompting of a final ruse.

"Wait," he said hoarsely. "Listen. You win; I did kill Eagle Feather. But by mistake. I didn't kill him with fire sticks. Is the Kiksan just?"

The tyee pondered over this.

"*Klosh wawa,*" he said gravely at last. "It is good talk. The Kiksans are just."

He spoke a few words in his own tongue to a clansman of Eagle Feather's beside him, and a lifted gun barrel glinted in the firelight.

Colter looked in the muzzle of a carbine he had brought up the Skeena from the coast that fall. There was a crashing burst of flame, and the report sang through the wood with an echo which he did not hear.

Hidden gold on a South Sea island—and the ruthless greed of the lawless

TREASURE TROUBLE

By SHANE O'HARA

STANTON lifted himself on an elbow. He was startled by what he saw from the front of the open tent. Hallis was out in the lagoon with the whaleboat. And the blazing red of morning was on the eastern horizon.

Lund was still asleep, his yellowish hair touseled damply on his forehead. His sunburned hands lay above the blanket. They were patterned with scratches made by the lawyer vines after weeks of hunting for the missing gold of the *Antarctica*. The squarerigger had been burned by a mutinous crew from the Australian gold fields some sixty years before, and her rawhide bags of treasure were supposed to be hidden on Buccaneer Lagoon.

"Lund," Stanton called in a low tone. "Listen. Don't move, but get this. He's out in the whaler."

Lund opened his eyes. "What's the matter?" he demanded, alert at once, and somewhat alarmed by being wakened so cautiously.

"Lay still. Hallis may not see us—he's rowing in—but I don't want him to know we're wise that he's been away from camp."

"Where is he?"

"Out in the lagoon, I tell you. No knowing how long he's been gone—or

where he's been. I don't like it."

Lund put both hands behind his head and lifted enough to look out past the coconut palms before the tent into the blazing color of the lagoon. Ed Hallis was pulling for the beach. The white boat left two great lines of ripples on the water astern, spreading away like a slowly opening fan.

"Where'd he get all the big ambish this morning. He turned in last night worn out and disgusted."

"That was all bluff. He didn't want us to think he'd be up before daylight."

"Maybe he's just been out fishing."

"Maybe. But were going to have trouble with him."

"What's to make trouble? We're both about broke now, and we've found no gold. Tom Hallis will be back with the *Claribel* to take us back to Sydney, like you paid him to do. No row about that, far's I can see."

"I never should have let him quit the *Claribel* to cook for us," said Stanton. "He's mean."

"I'd say that Cap'n Tom Hallis suspected all the time we come here for gold and not for birds. That stuff how Ed Hallis wanted to lay off being mate for his brother on account of not feeling well was all smoke in our eyes."

Stanton nodded. "I found a gun in his tent last night."

Lund squinted across the tent. Anger flushed his face. "What the hell! He ain't supposed to have a gun!"

Stanton reached under his bag of leaves which served as a pillow. "Here it is. See that bare spot on the blueing of the barrel? I saw this automatic in Cap'n Hallis's gear aboard the *Claribel.*" He thrust the weapon back out of sight.

"If you found one, he may have another. And he'll make a row when he finds it's gone."

"Let him row. You keep your own handy, and I'll keep my gun under my shirt—and this one where I can use it quick. Don't let him know we think there's anything wrong about his being out with the boat."

"Got any idea how long he's been gone?"

"I thought I heard him moving in his tent about two o'clock. He's been gone about four hours. Thought he was up to tighten the tent guys, because there was a pretty good breeze off the hills at that time. But he was sneaking away from camp then. And I was so tired I just couldn't keep awake."

"But where'd he go with the boat in the middle of the night?"

Stanton shook his head. "Don't know. Cap'n Hallis is about due with the schooner. Maybe Ed went out past the heads to have a look at the horizon."

"But why not let his brother come in with the schooner? If we'd found anything, I wouldn't put it past that pair to try and gyp us out of it. But with no gold found, what's the use of him losing sleep to look for the *Claribel?*"

"Why'd he lie and say he didn't have a gun on him? Don't ask me riddles. We're going to have trouble with the Hallis brothers, but we don't want to start anything. Lay low and play dumb. We'll find out what the game is."

"Going out and hunt today, as usual?"

"Sure. We don't want Ed Hallis to think there's any reason to quit. But we'll switch the dope on him. You and I go to the side where he's been on the hunt alone, and we'll send him over where we've been digging around."

STANTON drank from the jug near at hand, keeping an eye on the approaching boat. When he had the jug back in place, he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "With a pair of rifles buried in the sand under our cots we don't need to worry much about Hallis. There'll be no trouble until that tough brother of his shows up with the *Claribel.*"

"But what's to fight about?" insisted Lund. "I've asked you that before.

And what the hell would he want of a gun, anyway? We've got one apiece, so—"

"Gold is what they'd fight about," broke in Stanton.

"What gold? We ain't found any."

"If they think we have, we'll be in for more trouble than if we had it. That's what's eating Hallis."

"Be damned if you ain't right!"

"Keep cool and quiet. That's one reason I'm going to send Hallis over on the shore we've been working. We've been here two months. He thinks you and I are rigging things so he'll be shut out of the fifth of what we find."

Lund stared, realizing that Stanton had a good idea of what to expect from the Hallis brothers when they got together. He reached absently for the cigarette makings.

"Don't smoke," warned Stanton. We'll pretend to be asleep. I want to watch Hallis and see how he acts when he thinks we're not awake."

As their feet were toward the open front of the tent, they could lie with their heads on pillows and watch Hallis row for the beach some fifty yards away from the board table near the fire stones.

Hallis drew the whaler up on the beach and jumped out. He carried a rattan basket which dripped. As he approached the fire stones, he peered toward the tents, but evidently believed Stanton and Lund to be asleep.

Starting the fire with coconut husks, Hallis proceeded to clean his fish. He went for fresh water to the spring in a nearby clump of bamboo. Then he put on the coffee, washed his fish, and put some in the pan.

He was in his bare feet, his old canvas trousers rolled to his knees. There was a jaunty cockiness about him, and he worked with swift motions. For weeks he had moved about laggardly, but this morning he had new life in him. His powerful arms, bare in the sleeveless shirt, showed the light brown color of many freckles, but his tanned hands were almost black. With his visored cap with the greenish brass buttons on each side, Hallis was something of his old self, as swift and willing in his actions as when he quit his berth as mate aboard his brother's schooner to stay with Stanton and Lund as cook.

The partners were supposed to be looking for birds for a museum, and when Hallis asked to stay with them, Stanton assented. But the secret that what was really being sought for was the gold from the *Antarctica* finally came out and Hallis was offered a fifth to help in the hunting. By that time Stanton felt that the brothers suspected his real purpose in dropping off at Buccaneer Lagoon. As the gold proved not to be where it should be, Stanton felt it safer to take Ed Hallis into his confidence. Besides, an extra man to help with the hunting increased the chances of finding the gold in the two months they were to work while they waited for the *Claribel* to pick them up and take them to Sydney. Both Stanton and Lund held mate's papers, but both of them were out of employment when Stanton got an inside tip of where the mutineers had hidden the gold on the island. A few days of search convinced them that the tip lacked any inside.

Hallis squatted on his heels and tended the fire with a stick. Now and then he looked tentward. He whistled silently, shutting his eyes against the smoke, which rose in a thin blue pillar and then mushroomed overhead in the morning breeze. The sun birds chattered among the wild coco palms and the jungles chirped and creaked and rustled with the hidden life under the great mats of lianas twisted over the tops of the stunted trees not far from the sand of the wide beaches.

The sun was well up now and losing some of its red glare. To the westward the jungled hills glowed rosily in the canyons, but the enclosing headlands to the eastward on the inner side of the

semicircular island still stood up like dark barriers because they held their own shadows.

"We might as well turn out," said Stanton. "He's going to wait for us." He sat up and yawned noisily.

Lund pulled on his dungarees and wrapped his battered boots with strips of old cloth; the sharp coral and volcanic rock of the lagoon cut footwear to shreds. He looked older than Stanton, for the latter had shaved the night before and was almost boyish. They were both in their late twenties, but sea weather in hot climates had bronzed and lined their faces.

"Chow coming up!" called Hallis. He began laying out the tin plates and knives and forks now that there was no necessity for keeping quiet. He began to whistle a merry tune.

"What're you frying?" called Stanton.

"Fish—fresh out of the lagoon."

"You been fishing already? Good for you, Hallis. I can bite some fresh fish. I thought maybe it was one of the last cans of bully beef you had on the fire."

"Didn't sleep very good," said Hallis. "That old fever coming back on me. Not bad, but I thought what was the use just tryin' to see the top of the tent in the dark, and struck out." He added, "I could use some more of them husks."

"I'll get 'em," said Lund. He hurried down into the grove where they opened drinking coconuts, while Stanton washed in the basin on the board table at the far end. He kept a wary eye on Hallis, for it looked as if he wanted to get Lund away by himself. While Stanton had not mentioned the fact to Lund, it was possible that Hallis had already missed his automatic—and had another gun concealed in his clothing. He wore a rope belt with an elaborate knot over his right hip which could easily help to conceal a weapon under the loose canvas trousers.

LUND returned and threw an armful of husks on the fire, and then pushed them with the fire stick about the big coffee pot. While he washed, Stanton poured coffee, and Hallis got out the shoulder packs they used for carrying food and water while away from camp searching the jungle.

It was not until Stanton went to the tent for his white cloth hat with the brim turned up all around, that he noticed Hallis was filling only two water bags from the jug. And only two packs were laid out for filling.

"Filled your pack already?" asked Stanton, as he took fish from the sizzling pan Lund laid on the table.

"I ain't fillin' it today," said Hallis.

"You mean you're not making a hunt?"

"Don't feel very good. No sleep to speak of last night. And the sun kind of swoons me. Felt it even before I got in out of the lagoon. I'm wore out—and so be you two if you'd say as much."

"You'd better lay up in camp today," said Stanton.

Hallis set his jaws. His lips firmed. He lifted his shoulders in a careless shrug, and spoke with a trace of his usual surliness. "You might as well know that I'm fed up with this game."

"I don't blame you," said Stanton. "Quit if you like. But you've taken eight days off, now and then, while Lund and I have kept going. How about that fifth?"

"To hell with the fifth," retorted Hallis. "You can have mine and start a bank with it."

"I won't start anything, Hallis, with what I find. But I'm going to keep on the look. I'm a couple of thousand dollars in the hole."

"I ain't kickin'," said Hallis. "I'm just done and good and plenty on picking vines apart. When I went in on the deal with you, I thought you had something of the know."

"I thought so, myself. Gold's on this island. Son of one of the mutineers told me, and—"

"And he was as big a liar as his old man, who was hung for the mutiny sixty years ago, and if the old man'd known where the gold was then, he'd ha' bought the rope away from the hangman with the truth. Fact of the matter is, he was in the mutiny, but not in the gold hiding afterwards. I don't believe the ship was burned near here at all—that was just smoke in the eyes of the law."

"There's a few of the rawhide bags left, you know well enough. The bars were scattered around in the jungles—and one day's hunting's as good as another."

"Tom'll be back with the *Claribel* any old day, so hurry," was Hallis's curt remark. He began to gather the dishes into the pan.

Stanton rose, eager to get away. "There's a chance, and I'll take it."

"You won't find gold enough to fill a tooth."

"We'll try it over your side today. What marker did you leave to show how far you'd hunted?"

Hallis waved a freckled hand down the beach. "Pile of stones with a big hunk of brain coral on top—couple of miles. It's a damned sight tougher shore than you and Lund have been workin'. Vines full of fish hooks and the rock sharp as spikes under 'em. It's all for fifty miles around this lagoon, and you can have 'em all—heat and bats and lizards and your throat full of lava dust while your back runs wet with sweat." He began to load the packs for the two men.

Stanton lit his pipe and rested a few minutes. Lund repaired his old gloves with a sail needle and string, sitting on the bench at the end of the table and having little to say.

"How about you, Lund?" asked Hallis abruptly. "You look wore out. But you'll keep goin' eh?"

"Right, Hallis," said Lund. "I'd quit myself, but I'll go along just to be company for Stanton. He's lost money on this."

"That's right, far as it goes. Well—right or no, I've quit, and I give the two of you the whole blasted island. Good luck to you both."

Stanton and Lund shouldered their packs. They headed down for the shore and reached the hard wet sand. There would be plenty of hot and dry volcanic dust to tramp through before the day was over.

"He expected an argument," said Stanton,when they were well away from the camp. "He's puzzled because we more or less agreed with him."

"That was the best way."

"I'm not so sure."

"He had them fish ready so we'd be away all the quicker, and he could loaf longer," said Lund. "And he'd change his tune mighty quick, if we found anything. That's when you'd find out how many guns he's got on him."

Stanton stopped suddenly, as if dismayed at what Lund said. He turned and looked back, hesitant about going on, though they were far out of sight of the camp. "I've just thought of something," he said.

"What?"

"Hallis stuck back in camp on us today because he knows his automatic has been lifted."

"I'd rather he'd have it missing than know where he can lay hands on it."

"He also wanted to hunt our tent over—probably to find his pistol, but more likely to dig up our rifles."

"But he doesn't know we've got 'em."

"No, of course not. But he's likely to sift the sand of the tent floor. He's going to be damned sure we've no weapons hidden away."

"Want to go back?"

"No. Don't want to show my hand." Stanton resumed his forward trudge.

They said little more for some time. They came to the pile of stones on the beach with the coral top which Hallis

had left as the limit of his search. They began work. Ridges of lava which had poured down the hills in ages past were roofed now by great mats of vines, so the jungles were edged by a vast series of caves formed by the rope-like lianas overrunning the tops of the ridges. They crawled under the vines covering each cave as they reached it, working the alternate caves. It was hot and exhausting work. It was three in the afternoon before they quit for a rest and a bite from the packs. Then they decided to quit for the day.

Stanton piled a few stones. "We'll start from here in the morning. I'm a bit nervous about Hallis, and we'll be dog tired by the time we get back anyway."

"Suits me," said Lund. His face was streaked now with rivulets of sweat which smeared the dark dust from the caves.

THEY started back. The still water of the lagoon was a blinding sheet of brilliance that shimmered crazily like a molten liquid at the boiling point.

They kept close to the jungle edge, for now the sun was at an angle which gave some shade from the tops of the wild cocopalms. They were walking for half an hour before Lund stopped. He had to clear his boots of loose sand. He sat on a rock which jutted out from the vines where the soil was so poor that a patch of vines had died out and were yellowish brown instead of green. They had long since passed the marker left by Hallis.

Stanton leaned against a palm and made a cigarette. He was worried.

"Blistered across the tops of my toes," said Lund, as he applied the salve they carried for bruises. "If I can keep the sand out—"

Stanton straightened swiftly, tense, staring over Lund's head. It was this swift action which had halted Lund's words.

"What's the matter?"

"Did you hear anything?" asked Stanton.

Lund listened. "I heard a flutter of dead vines, but I thought the boot behind me fell."

"No. There's something back in the brush—something alive—and moving." Stanton drew his own pistol and held it before him.

They both listened. Again they heard dead leaves rattle with sudden violence. It sounded like a man who had stepped in a hole covered with dried vines, slipped through, and had trouble in getting his foot clear. Then there was an abrupt silence.

Both Stanton and Lund thought of the same thing—it must be Hallis concealed inside the jungle. If he had followed to watch them, he would take cover as he saw them returning. He would want to listen to them talk.

Lund put on his boots. Before he was on his feet, they heard the vines rattle again. This time it sounded like a rock which had become dislodged from a vine-covered ridge, and rolled down into a cave which was full of the usual dead foliage.

With his revolver ready, Lund edged up to the green lianas. He was nearer than Stanton to the jungle. Both waited and listened, hoping the noise would be repeated. Stanton watched the top of the jungle, expecting to see some of the leaves move if there was any disturbance under them.

For several minutes they heard nothing. Then Lund pushed through the wall of vines. He saw into a cave between ridges. The sandy floor was scattered with dead vines and sprinkled with tiny spots of sunlight which filtered through the green roofing. It was a shallow place, extending far in and sloping upward. The far end was in darkness. They had hunted through hundreds of such places.

As Lund looked into this extensive shelter, the dead vines in the far end

where there was a pit of blackness, rattled abruptly. He heard the almost inaudible squeaks of some creature out of sight, and then silence again. He backed out into the sand.

"Nothing but a big bat up there hooked into the vines," said Lund.

Stanton concealed his gun again. But his worriment was not appeased.

They took a few steps toward camp. Then it seemed that the whole nearby jungle shook and rattled in a way that suggested a man tearing a passage through the vines.

Lund stopped. "I'm going to settle this, or I'll stay awake thinking about it. That poor devil is snagged bad and maybe starving to death."

"All right. I don't like bats, but let's have a look at him. My nerves are on edge, anyhow." Stanton followed Lund back to the cave.

With flashlights they located the winged creature lying on the rock-strewn ground among dead vines. It began to flop wildly when Lund threw the light upon it, and sought to rise with outstretched wings.

"He's been hurt," said Lund. "I'm going to finish him off. He's all tangled up."

Stanton looked for a minute. "He'll starve to death. All played out, and tearing himself to pieces on the stones. Hit him with your stick."

Stanton backed away, crouching. His foot slipped, he lost his balance and fell. He struck on his hands, and his light went flying away from him, but still burned among the vines.

Lund killed the bat, and got back to Stanton.

"Hurt yourself?"

"Cut my hand. Stepped on some rotten wood there, and it was slippery."

They got out into the sunlight. Stanton applied the iodine they always carried, for a scratch on tropical islands is dangerous. His fingers were covered with a dark slime which gave off an odor of rotten vegetation.

"You must've struck on another dead bat," said Lund. "Better come down to the surf and wash that muck off." He sniffed, then grabbed one of Stanton's hands. "That ain't rotten wood, it's old grease, and—" He stopped, and swung back toward the jungle. Before Stanton knew what Lund was about, he had disappeared under the vines.

"What'd you go back for?" called Stanton.

"Come in here. We've got to find where you fell."

Stanton went under the vines. They located the place he had slipped and fallen. Vines and old bark were a foot deep there, covering big round stones.

Lund tore a strip of what appeared to be bark on a crumbled log. He held it up to Stanton's beam of light, and bent it. It was spongy and damp. It did not break. Lund gave a gasping cry.

"What the devil's the matter with you, Lund?"

"This ain't bark. It's rotten—leather—and it stinks!"

"Hell, no!" Stanton knew what Lund ment. The *Antarctica's* stolen gold was in rawhide bags when it left the sailing vessel sixty years before.

"Hell, yes!" yelled Lund. "Keep your light on it. Edge full of holes where the cord stitching has torn out. Bull hide, that was sewn with a sail needle—and covered with—!" He checked his words and fell on his knees, to claw with his bare hands among the vines.

STANTON held the light. They saw mounds that they had mistaken for rocks. They proved to be four rawhide bags, which had been buried in sand, but in the course of time came to the surface by rain action, at the same time being overgrown by vines which died with the loss of sunlight.

Lund clawed and tore at the rotten leather. Then the light threw back dull yellowish gleams of soft brilliance—ingots of gold bullion. There could no

longer be doubt that they had struck the treasure they sought.

Each bag contained eight pigs of gold. Thirty-two yellow hunks, each worth about six thousand dollars. They spluttered with joyful curses.

When they could find no more bags under the raffle of dead vines, they broke for the sunlight, an ingot in each hand, as if eager to make sure of having gold by bringing it to sunlight. They danced in the sand, and Stanton's eyes were full of tears. Years of savings were not lost in what had seemed that morning a fruitless search—and a fool's quest.

"Bright as a bride's ring," said Lund. He hurled his bars into the white sand, where they all but buried themselves. They fell near the stick which he used to kill the bat.

Stanton threw down his bars, and leaned forward, as if staring at them in amazement. He swore with sudden violence, and with a peculiar bitterness in his tones.

"What the hell's eating you?" demanded Lund.

"Look at that stick!" said Stanton, his tone savage.

"Blood on it—off the bat. I don't want to look at sticks."

Stanton was gazing down the beach where they had been, his eyes hard set against the sun and his teeth clamped so his lean jaws stuck out with knotted muscles.

"Hallis missed this cave, didn't he, Lund?"

"Sure he missed it. His stone marker is a couple of miles behind us."

"What makes you so sure?"

"Sure? Why, he wouldn't keep going if—"

"Hallis found this gold. Damn his crooked soul! He found it, Lund—and he kept his mouth shut."

"Now, how do you know that? I don't like Hallis any better than you do, but—"

"That stick you killed the bat with—it was in that cave—and that stick has been used recently to tend a fire."

Lund picked up the stick. "Damned if you ain't right! But that don't prove anything."

"Hallis came over here with the whaler during the night. He had the fire stick with him. That pile of stones was to fool us. He found this gold a month ago—but he clubbed that bat last night."

Lund whistled as he realized the truth of Stanton's words. "No wonder he didn't want to hunt any longer!"

Stanton looked about him. "Bushes have been dragged over this sand to cover foot prints. See! Sand scratched, as if the wind blew dead branches—and see that hunk of coral a few yards this way? Marker for this cave."

Lund swore with vigor and venom.

"We've got to get out of here," declared Stanton. He kicked sand over the bars they had thrown down, and looked about hastily to seek something that would serve as a guide when they came back. He went to the coral chunk near the jungle, picked it up and carried it to a tree. He placed it on the side of the palm away from camp.

Lund adjusted his pack, still growling about the trickery of Hallis. And Lund's anger grew. "I'll kick him a mile down the beach when I get back."

"Come along," said Stanton. "We want to get in before dark—we've lost more time than we think."

Lund started at a rapid pace to overtake Stanton. Then Lund froze in his tracks. "Look! The *Claribel's* masts outside the heads. And she's anchored."

Stanton swung and looked seaward. The bare topmasts of the schooner were visible over the southern headland where it sloped down to meet the other enclosing horn of the circular island.

"Captain Tom Hallis! Is *that* what Ed Hallis used the whaler for?"

"He must've gone out to him and tipped Cap'n Tom that he knows where the gold is."

Stanton swung again toward camp—and stopped. He saw a boat from the

Claribel close to shore before the camp's location, rowed by four Malays from the crew, and a straw-hatted figure in the stern sheets. They knew then that while they were busy in the cave, Tom Hallis was rowing ashore from outside the heads, lacking wind to take the schooner inside.

"Lund, we've got to play the game that's handed us."

"How do you mean, play games with that pair of crooks? They know where the gold is, and we might as well tell 'em we know.'

"We won't know anything. Best angle is to get there worn out and ready to quit. Anyhow, with the *Claribel* here, we'll be willing to go. And the Hallis brothers will be mighty glad to take us away, because they can come back and pick up the gold. It'll keep, you know."

They resumed their way to camp, Stanton going over the details of how they were to convince Ed Hallis that they had started hunting caves at the point he left his pile of stones—and found nothing.

The sun was over the hills by the time they drew near camp. Hallis had the fire going, and they saw Tom Hallis sitting before their tent in the shaky canvas chair made from bamboo.

"What luck?" Ed Hallis called.

"The luck of a lousy calf," replied Stanton. "And I'm glad to see the *Claribel's* in. Howdy, Cap'n Hallis."

The skipper peered from under his cap. A cigar was gripped in his teeth. There was a curl of meanness in his thin lips. His white trousers showed the leanness of his hips. He did not rise, but continued asprawl in the chair. He wore only white trousers and a shirt, and was belted with a pistol belt with a pair of automatics in open holsters on either side. His blue eyes had craftiness in them, and there was something of a hidden triumph behind his gaze.

"So you didn't find any gold, hey? Well, I didn't want to interfere with your business here, but I could ha' told you that every bar rat in Sydney has kept fairly well soused for sixty years past on pretending to know where the *Antarctica's* gold was hid here. Now I'd say you're ready to call it a day, and get your gear aboard."

"I'm done," agreed Stanton, despair in his voice. He took off his hat and wiped the dust from his face. Lund showed that he was tired by sitting down before he reached the fire and throwing off his pack.

"Find my stones and the coral?" asked Ed Hallis, as he carried the pot of coffee to the table.

"Yes, and we worked from there on. But I don't believe there's anything that side. No beaches fit for a boat to land. Water shoals far out, and a boat loaded with a lot of men and a lot of gold—would not be able to get in there."

Hallis nodded in willing agreement. "I couldn't see no good of my working over that way. Just wastin' time. Thought you'd feel the same about it if you took a try yourself. So that's all settled."

Lund dragged himself to the table and took a mug of coffee. "When do we pull out of here, Cap'n?" he asked the viperish man in the chair.

"Mornin', if the wind serves. Generally get a draft this season little after sunup. But I stayed outside, so as not to have to take a chance of wearing out anchor chain for a week for want of wind." But the words of Tom Hallis were insincere. He cared little what he said, so long as Stanton and Lund were misled as to why he had left the schooner outside. And Tom Hallis knew that the fortune which Stanton sought lay ready for the taking, a fact which filled the *Claribel's* skipper with a satisfaction he found difficult to conceal.

"Then we'd better go out to her tonight," said Stanton. "But we're too tired, Lund and myself, to bear a hand at packing our gear."

"You don't need to bother about that," said Tom Hallis. "We'll go off in the boat after you've had a bite and

rested up. I'll leave two of my crew to pack the whaler, and send my boat back to help. You don't want to tackle any job of work like packing up tonight."

Stanton took off his heavy shoes and the wrappings which protected his ankles against jungle leeches. He tossed the shoes over near the fire. It was his custom to dry his shoes every night. He had canvas slippers to wear in the soft sand of the camp. When he got the slippers he made sure that the rifles buried under the cots were not disturbed.

"Stew ready," Ed Hallis called from the fire.

"We're taking a swim first," said Stanton. "Go ahead and deal it off."

LUND followed Stanton to the beach. They stripped and had a whirl in the warm water. They knew they were being watched. They had taken their pistols with their clothes. But neither Stanton nor Lund expected a fight as long as the four Malays were loafing on the beach with the *Claribel's* boat. Yet Stanton knew why the schooner had been left at anchor outside the heads. Captain Tom Hallis did not want his native crew to witness any killing if he found it necessary.

Then something happened which made Stanton realize at once that danger threatened to come to a head in the next few minutes. As he walked to his clothes, while Lund was still swimming, Ed Hallis picked up one of Stanton's shoes—and said something with caution to his brother Tom, still in the reclining chair before the tents.

Stanton watched, pretending to be busy dressing. He saw Tom Hallis go to the fire. They spoke in low tones. But Ed Hallis was in tense excitement, proven by his quick gestures, and his furtive turnings to make sure he was not observed from the beach.

There was a hasty conference at the fire, Ed Hallis holding the shoe in his hand, but turning to conceal it in case Stanton was looking—which he was, but covertly.

Captain Hallis, lazily slow in his movements up to that time, became alert. He was interested to the point of stiffening his shoulders and thrusting his head downward the better to see what his brother was talking about. And Ed Hallis, holding the shoe close up to his own face, swore harshly. Stanton did not catch the words. But he knew at once the danger which had flashed across the situation.

Ed Hallis tossed the shoe back to where he had picked it up. Captain Hallis turned back to the chair, then stopped, and as if he had reached a sudden decision, waved a hand in gesture that thrust everything away from him. In the growing dusk of the palm grove, he moved now with a tigerish speed, his long white legs measuring off the ground as he started for his boat and the four Malays.

"Hell's ready to pop," said Stanton, as Lund arrived to dress.

"Pop where?" asked Lund, startled.

"Don't look up to the fire. See that your gun's ready."

Lund had already seen Captain Hallis moving toward the boat, which was some twenty yards from where they stood. "Where's he going?"

"Maybe back to the schooner. Ed Hallis found stinking rawhide on my shoe. That was what made me slip. He smelled it—and they know we've struck the hidden bags that Hallis found." Stanton talked swiftly and in a low growling tone, while he dressed as fast as he could.

Lund hissed through his teeth. The Hallis brothers would not let them get away from the island alive, crew or no crew.

Stanton stood for a minute looking over to the whaler, another ten yards beyond the *Claribel's* boat. "If we can get in the whaler and slip away long enough—"

"No chance," broke in Lund. "The

skipper could catch us with crew. Mind your eye, now, and take no chances with this bird coming down."

Night struck suddenly. The fireflies began pencilling luminous curves in the far palms up the beach. The four cigars of the Malays in the boat began to glow redly against the darkened water beyond them. Ed Hallis poked up the fire. It became a miniature volcanic crater, red hot, and giving off sparks. And Captain Tom Hallis continued to stride down toward the boat, his white legs vaguely visible.

No one back in Sydney knew where Stanton and Lund were. The run down to the island was in the regular way of the *Claribel's* trips to the eastern islands. Yet it seemed impossible that Captain Hallis would risk a shooting mêlée while four Malays were on the beach, for a fight which would end in the death of a white man would let the outside world know there had been trouble at Buccaneer Lagoon—and trouble there could only be about gold.

"Don't you intend to stop ashore for supper, cap'n?" called Stanton.

"Sure! I'm sending the boat back so the men can eat," answered Tom Hallis. "Go ahead up—I'll be back in a minute. Ed's got everything ready." The skipper kept on his way. His pistol holsters clicked against his belt as he walked.

Stanton moved up toward camp, Lund with him. They did not meet the skipper, but he passed them a dozen yards away, and kept on his course to the boat. Stanton stopped to watch. Ed Hallis lit a lantern and hung it over the camp table.

A thin moon, bent and with sharpened spikes, swung up above the hills. The stars, heavy with the night's damp, swung low. Their reflections swayed drunkenly on the lagoon water.

The Malays in the boat moved expectantly as Tom Hallis approached them. His words droned back to Stanton and Lund. They began to set their oars at the boat. One man kept saying, "Ai, tuan," as the skipper prolonged his instructions.

"He's taking care that they don't come back for him tonight," Stanton whispered. "That means a jam for us."

"They can't take that gold away from us," said Lund. He spat with swift rage.

They lingered, waiting for Tom Hallis to come up again. It struck Stanton that they might capture him when he was unaware that they had fathomed his hidden purposes, and thereby gain an advantage over Ed Hallis. But Captain Hallis hung on the beach while the boat put off, and watched the Malays row away.

The boat turned to port when it was only a few yards out. The ripples at its stern danced and caught the moonlight in converging stripes, while the phosphorescent water churned like silver fire. It appeared then that the boat had been sent toward the hidden gold down that way—to lay nearby until the Hallis brothers were ready to lift the treasure.

Stanton caught his breath in wonderment, trying to solve the new puzzle. But he had only a short time to wait. The *Claribel's* boat swung in toward the whaler. Then it was plain that the only boat which gave Stanton and Lund a chance to get away from the island, was to be taken.

"Come on, Lund," said Stanton. "We might as well settle this now—he's grabbing the whaler!" He strode down toward Captain Hallis.

"What're you going to do with the whaler?" demanded Stanton.

"Why, I'm sending it out to the schooner to fetch in some grub—and something to drink. You're about out of the fancy things at camp."

STANTON stopped, twenty feet away from Tom Hallis. They were all in moonlight now—and Lund a trifle to the left of Stanton, but behind him. And Lund had his hand ready to his gun.

"Tell your men to leave the whaler

where it is, Captain Hallis!" said Stanton.

"What's that?" The skipper's question was like the snap of a lash. He swung to face Stanton.

"You heard me. Tell 'em to sheer off."

"Who the hell are you to tell me what to do?"

"I'm the guy your brother tried to play a sneak game on, if you want to know, Cap'n Hallis. Don't you try it."

Ed Hallis could be heard running down through the palm grove. But neither Stanton nor Lund turned to look.

Tom Hallis waved a beckoning arm. "Come on, Ed. They want to make trouble." His shoulders drooped forward in a crouch. His legs went wide apart, knees limp. Only his thin jaws were in light, the upper part of his face in the shadow of his cap. His right hand whipped downward and there was an upward thrust. He leaped to the right and fired at the same time.

Lund fired close upon the captain's shot—so close that both reports were nearly merged into one. And Tom Hallis swayed to the right as his right knee buckled under him.

Stanton turned to meet Ed Hallis, knowing that Lund would attend to the skipper. The rowers in the boat stopped.

"You get back to camp," warned Stanton. He had both his own guns out, and the automatic he had taken from Ed Hallis.

Ed Hallis stopped. "What're you firin' on Tom for?"

"I'm hit in the leg," yelped the captain. "They're trying to murder me."

Stanton knew the Malays were listening. "You fired first, Captain Hallis. You both wanted a fight when you were ready for it, but if there's any shooting to be done, now's the time—and we've picked it." Stanton faced Ed Hallis, while Lund watched the skipper.

"We don't want no trouble," said Ed Hallis. "We thought you was goin' back aboard the schooner and quit here."

"You're a damned liar," retorted Stanton.

All this took place swiftly close upon the shots, but Stanton knew that what the brothers wanted was to get the Malays out of hearing before fighting was resumed. That was something Stanton would not allow.

"What the hell you talkin' about?" demanded Ed Hallis with a righteous indignation in his tone.

"I've got to get back aboard and fix my leg. I got a bullet in it," complained the skipper.

"Call that boat in," said Stanton. "You wanted to steal our whaler, and when I tried to stop you, you wouldn't. You get to hell off this island!"

"Is that so?" demanded Ed Hallis. "What about me?"

"Get out, too. You can make the beach, but don't come straight down. Go ahead."

Hallis moved a few steps. The captain began limping toward the beach. "Pull in here, serang!" he called.

The rowers obeyed the order on the instant. There was some chattering among them in a subdued way, but by the time Captain Hallis reached the shingle, the boat was there to meet him. Two men jumped out and waded ashore. to assist him. They fell with him, and he went into the water cursing with his own peculiar malignancy. The serang yelled at the stupid pair helping the captain and struck at them with the tiller. His turbaned head bobbed about over the gunwale, clear cut against the moonlit water, and presently Tom Hallis was in the stern sheets.

While this was going on, Ed Hallis was trotting down toward the beach. He shifted from light to shadow among the palms. Suddenly he disappeared. He was behind the bole of a big coconut palm, some hundred feet from where Stanton stood.

"All right, Tom?" Ed Hallis inquired, still hidden to the others.

"I'll do. Stop there." Then the skipper spoke to the rowers, and the boat moved out.

Both Stanton and Lund understood now that Ed Hallis was to remain ashore, though Stanton had told him to get out with his brother. They could not understand the purpose behind the skipper's order to his brother at the moment. That Ed Hallis would stay when two armed men wanted him to go seemed to lack sense. But Lund grasped the situation in a minute, when Stanton said "Look out for Ed—he's between us and the whaler."

The Malays again turned the boat to go for the whaleboat. Ed Hallis was there to prevent Stanton or Lund from interfering, for if they ran to protect their boat, Ed Hallis was on their flank behind a big tree.

"What do you want to act this way for?" demanded Ed Hallis from the cover of the tree.

Stanton knew the question was only to gain time for the captain's boat to get to the whaler. "I'll tell you, Ed Hallis, You found gold and held out on us. We ran into it—and your fire stick—and you found rotten rawhide on my shoe."

"Think you're goin' to get the gold away from here?"

"If we don't, then you don't."

"Who's goin' to stop us?"

There was nothing to be gained in such talk. Stanton turned to Lund. "Make for the whaler. We've got to hold that."

Lund started for the beach on a slow trot in order to get well around Ed Hallis at a distance, and to mislead him as to what was intended. At the same time Stanton started for the mate.

But Ed Hallis broke from the cover of his tree and began running so as to head off Lund. But Lund put on speed and gained toward the whaler. Stanton then got into a position where he could prevent Ed Hallis from following Lund, and stopped.

"Get to the water!" commanded Stanton. "I'll drill you if you stick ashore here." He threw up a weapon, ready to fire if the mate refused to obey. Ed then moved toward shore, but slowly.

In the meantime Captain Hallis was yelling at the boat's crew. They would not keep on toward the whaler, for Lund had reached it, and had taken cover in the stern sheets. They knew both Lund and Stanton, and wanted no hand in gunplay.

"Better take me off, Tom," called Ed Hallis. "You need to get at bandages, and—"

There was a scream from the boat. Tom Hallis had swung the tiller at a man—and hit him. The shrill cries of the serang mingled in the confusion on the water. "All right, damn you, go get the mate," bawled the skipper. The boat turned back for Ed Hallis.

One of the men was complaining bitterly. The serang was trying to soothe him, both talking in Malay.

"Shut up, you stinkin' flatfish!" roared Captain Hallis. He continued to curse them all until his brother waded out and climbed over the stem.

"Now then, put some beef behind them oars and get back to the schooner! We'll come back in the morning, Ed, and clean this job up proper."

"And a hell of a fine time you'll have doing it," called Lund.

Captain Hallis paid no attention to Lund. The men were clumsy with their oars, more concerned in talking in Malay than in getting out into the lagoon. Captain Hallis began to rage at them. Stanton saw the tiller lifted, as the skipper rose from his seat. The serang grabbed the improvised weapon and prevented a blow falling upon the man beyond him, for the serang was rowing with the stroke.

"He's the trouble maker," yelled Captain Hallis. "I'll kill him if—" The sentence ended in a scuffle, and then there was a shot. Stanton saw the spurt of flame from the skipper's waist. A man fell back over a thwart.

"No, no, no, tuan!" yelped the serang. He lifted an oar to ward off a blow, but was not quick enough with the heavy

beam. Captain Hallis struck him across the face.

"*Tumbuk ladal*" yelled the serang. He dropped his oar and sprang aft at the skipper, just as Ed Hallis was knocking the nearest Malay out of his path to get aft to his brother.

Stanton knew that the serang's call was an order to the other men to use their curved daggers. But he did not see the blow struck by the serang at Captain Hallis—he heard only the skipper's long and wailing cry as the blade went home.

Ed Hallis, past the bow oar, was knifed from two sides at almost the same instant that his brother was struck, and his body went over the gunwhale into the moonlit lagoon. They threw Tom Hallis into the water, and then the boat started for shore.

By this time Stanton had joined Lund in the whaler. "Here, serang!" But the serang landed twenty yards away and walked along the beach.

The serang, a thin little man in a sarong, lifted off his turban as he approached Stanton and Lund.

"Plenty bad trouble man, tuan," said the serang. "Do you think the law will tie a rope to my head and let me waver in the wind for this night's work? By Allah, it was the only way!"

"We can swear that you struck to save your own life and the lives of your crew, if you will take us, when we are ready, to the law man."

The serang bowed. He put his turban back on his head, removed his betel box from the folds of his sarong, and took a cresh chew. Then he stooped and cleaned his curved kris in the sand.

"*Baik,* tuan. *Baik.* Very damned good. My head is bent to your orders, tuan. But go plenty quick—my father's father always told me there was blood in the waters of this island. I have put some of it there. The moon looks good, but there are evil spirits among the trees here on shore, so we wait for you until the sun comes out in the boat." He pressed the backs of his hands to his forehead, bowed, and trotted back to the boat.

Stanton and Lund went back to camp and made up the fire, while the Malays out in the boat, chanted some song of victory.

GUNS UP!

A Thrilling Complete War-time Novelette of No Man's Land, and the Artillery Swinging Into Action—

By
THEODORE
FREDENBURGH

THROUGH a shimmering haze of heat the midday sun stared like a round white eye upon a shallow valley. A bare brown slope descended to meet the motionless stand of yellow wheat spread over the floor of the valley; and this in turn ended against a shell wrecked stretch of woodland that screened the German main position on the low, bare ridge behind it.

American artillery fire, concentrated on the German works, blasted them skyward in flaming geysers of yellow dust and smoke. Shells whistled overhead, and bursting, sprayed the empty valley with splintered steel.

Bedraggled, sweating and dirty the four men sprawled belly-down in the knee-high wheat grimly ignored the flying death about them.

"Scarno and I are going forward into the woods." Lieutenant Cloud's voice crackled as he turned his thin inscrutable face towards Sergeant Booster Doane.

"Now listen and get this. We will contact our infantry there, and find a place from which to observe fire. Then we'll wait for the second attacking force to arrive. You and Parsons are to locate yourselves meantime where the infantry telephone men can find you easily." He pointed without lifting himself from the screening wheat. "On that knoll; over there on our left. When the telephone line arrives have it extended forward to me. And don't think, Doane," he concluded with a note of cold menace in his voice, "that you can repeat out here your insubordinate tricks of two days ago. If you attempt anything you will hang or rot in prison for disobedience under fire. Now go!"

Booster heaved himself a little higher on his bent elbows. A shock of sandy hair escaping from beneath his battered helmet clung damply to his forehead. He wiped it back with a quick swipe of his hand.

"It's got to be *that* knoll?" he queried tossing his sun-browned face toward a grassy hillock which rose boldly a hundred yards to the left of the group. His blue eyes met Cloud's coldly.

"Why not?" Cloud snapped.

"Because, sir," Booster's voice was brittlely sarcastic. "It's bald as a lamppost: it's in plain view of a section of the enemy's line; and, all in all, is the most hazardous spot in sight—sir." His eyes held Cloud's as he recited his objections.

"Are you refusing my orders?" Cloud demanded.

Booster's eyes gleamed with contempt; but his voice was smooth as silk.

"Certainly not, sir." He looked at the other two. "Come on, Horse; we've got our orders. So long, Mike. Good luck."

"Watch your step!" Little Mike Scarno's swarthy Italian face split into a wide white-toothed smile, and he slapped Booster's leg as his friend passed wriggling rapidly through the rustling grain towards the edge of the field, ten yards away. Arriving there Booster cautiously raised his head and examined the knoll.

"It's not so bad," he remarked cheerfully. "Look, Horse, there's a new shell hole right smack at the top."

"Most likely our graves." Horse stretched his long body flat among the wheat stalks and wagged his long, bony and horse-like head gloomily. "Our luck is out."

"How come?"

A shell shrieked nearby, and they hugged the damp ground while a hurricane of whispering death sighed across their prone bodies.

"How come?" Booster repeated when the storm had passed.

"Things ain't breakin' right," Horse rasped significantly. He was full of pessimism. "First off, when Cloud joins the battery he finds you and Mushhead Breemer fightin'. Two sergeants brawlin' in the middle of the road! And for what? Because Mushhead got tough with that kid Tracy that ain't dry behind the ears yet."

"Young Tracy is only sixteen by the clock," Booster retorted, "and Mushhead is a big dumb ox and a bully; and what's more instead of stalling when Cloud caught us he up and spills the beans like the dirty welcher that he is."

"Yeah," Horse agreed dryly, "so you got to sass Cloud then until his little lizard soul is so hot and puffy he orates before Captain Orcutt like a senator with a flea in his pants.

" 'Ahem,' says Orcutt when he can get a word in edgeways, 'I think it would be a good idea if these three men went as artillery contacts with you, Mr. Cloud, to cover this infantry jamboree that's opening tonight. It will teach them discipline and co-operation. I'll look after Breemer myself,' he says." Horse screwed his face into a sour knot. "So here we are," he concluded acidly, "learning discipline and co-operation."

A sudden shell—and another—crashed near them.

"Lay off the grousing." Booster

cocked his head sharply. "Say! Are those shells coming from our side? They *are!*" he answered himself as a prolonged, whistling shriek announced another arrival. "Let's get out of here." He sprang erect, and with Horse pounding after him raced to the still smoking shell hole on the knoll, and dived in.

Crouched against the bottom of the hole Booster swore feelingly. "Our guns are firing short. Some fool is asleep on the job," he panted bitterly. "It's Cloud's problem. Quick, Horse, take a look! A battalion of infantry is due here any minute."

"I'd be all broke up if Cloud wasn't in sight," Horse panted sourly, without moving.

"Okay, Useless," Booster flopped onto his belly, and put his head above the edge of the hole.

TOWARD the German trenches and slightly to his right the woodland was a reach of tattered foliage hanging to splintered sticks. Rearward a long bare slope rose from the valley to a crest that was sharply marked by the yellow stain of dirt thrown out of trenches cut along its length. The wheatfield on his right was empty save for the stiffening bodies which marked the final surge of the attack which had carried the woods. Poppies like crimson blood-clots glowed against the yellow wheat.

Beyond the shattered woods an accurate and well directed, all-calibre concentration of American artillery fire flamed, blasting the German trenches to dust.

Nearby an equally inaccurate, misdirected and ghastly zone-fire from one or two American 75 batteries raked an area fronting the German positions, one hundred meters square. The woods, the wheatfield, and the knoll where Booster grimly crouched, were swept by the assassinating fire of friendly but misguided guns.

Booster knew that, in addition to Cloud and Scarno, the woods sheltered exhausted fragments of the decimated infantry battalion which had that morning gallantly cleared the valley, and by carrying the woods, laid their threat on the enemy's threshold.

Now, in desperation and despair, the weary men would be crouching in foxholes or behind flimsy barricades under the slaughtering fire of friendly guns whose true mission was the protection and advancement of infantrymen.

Meantime orders bound them. They were to hold their present position until re-enforced; and were then to assault the enemy trench system, which, before their eyes, squirmed beneath the iron thumb of the artillery.

Booster's mouth hardened.

Several snakelike columns of bayonets flashed hard and bright near the top of the bare slope to the rear. In them Booster recognized the second American attacking force moving forward as a re-enforcing and storm battalion—and, unless something happened to change the picture, helpless victims to the error which blocked their path with screaming death.

Booster swung his glasses up and searched the hillside swiftly. Brown and green and gray it reached eternally across the lenses of his glasses. Abruptly his head went forward and his eyes focused.

Against a brown patch on the hillside, quite close, two men jerkily laid a diagonal course across the slope toward him. As he watched they were for a second etched against a gray patch of earth and stones. Booster clearly recognized on one the outline of a wire-reel; and by the expert flip of the other's hands paying out the wire, knew them for the awaited telephone detail. Booster grunted his satisfaction. The next instant he was back in the hole mopping sweat from his dripping face.

"Hot, huh?" Horse snickered significantly.

"Stick your ugly head into that boiler

factory and find out, goldbrick!" Booster retorted irritably.

A shell crashed, showering stones into the hole. "I don't need to look. Y'got to do something about this short fire." Horse yelped, sitting up popeyed after his sudden dive to the bottom of the hole.

"What can I do?" Booster countered shortly. "Cloud is in charge. The infantry is moving down the hill. If those telephone men on the hill don't get bumped off maybe we can do something. I don't know."

"If we don't get a ticket from one of our own shells in the meantime, you mean. Why don't you send up the 'lengthen range' signal—it's a black smoke bomb, ain't it?"

"Nothing doing," said Booster firmly.

"Why not?"

"Orders. No signal bombs go up without authority from Cloud. Besides if we signal 'lengthen range,' the concentration fire on the main enemy positions would lift; and our infantry, on the hill, and in the woods, would get a basting from the Kraut machine gunners."

"That's better than being smeared by fire from your own guns, ain't it?" Horse snorted. "How do you know Cloud ain't out of the picture?"

"I don't!" Booster said tartly. "So telescope your scrawny neck and lay low."

"Discipline and co-operation." Horse moaned. "Thanks to you we're more likely to turn into a stick with a sign on it. 'Two American Soldiers R. I. P.'"

"Stick your beezer over the edge and spot that telephone detail again," Booster commanded. "That'll give you something to worry about."

"Holy Cripes!" Horse jumped erect.

In line with his pointing finger a mushroom of black smoke hung motionless above the ragged woods nearby.

"There y'are," Horse muttered. "Cloud got sick of having home grown shells popping at the back of his neck."

Booster's mind was racing. Black Smoke—Lengthen Range; that was the code. The murderous short fire would lift from the path of the attackers—but what of the concentration that must remain squarely on the German trench system if the enemy machine gunners were to be kept bottled up there?

He thrust Horse aside and recklessly thrust his head into the open.

THE ATTACKING infantry, much closer now, was deploying in waves. The long undulating lines wavered across the hillside. Beyond the trampled wheatfield, the two telephone men, apparently oblivious to the din and flying death all about them, expertly strung a light wire telephone line across the tortured earth. As Booster watched, the rearmost of the two dived grotesquely at the ground. The first man turned back and stooped over his partner. In a few seconds he had stripped the body of necessary telephone equipment and, with his added load, was again paying out wire with an expert flip of his practiced fingers.

"One of the telephone guys is out," Booster commented grimly.

In response to the smoke signal the artillery had already lengthened range. The scattering short fire was falling nearer the enemy lines. Also the fire which had been concentrated on the German lines had moved, and was now falling uselessly behind the enemy positions. Enemy machine guns, released by the lifted concentration, were loosing thin torrents of death in a rising crescendo that racketed like a thousand sticks against picket fences.

The remaining telephone man moved stolidly into the wheat field, which was now being swept by the enemy machine guns. Booster could see him clearly. He could see the bulge of a tobacco quid in the side of his lean face.

Machine gun bullets whanged across the hole and Booster dropped back to safety. A burst ripped along the lip of

the hole flinging dirt and stones in the air.

"You're so damn curious," Horse said acidly. "Now y'got them shooting at us."

"Dry up," Booster cracked. "That telephone guy is in the wheat field. If he don't make it—and he won't—we'll have to go down there ourselves!"

"The hell you say!" Horse turned defiant eyes on Booster and spat. "Fathead Cloud sent the rocket up and I'll be damned if I'm going to get my pants shot off for him or any other jackass shavetail."

"Dry up," Booster snapped bleakly. "I'll go myself if I have to. You stay here and protect your precious can."

"Aw listen, Booster," Horse began.

"Nuts!"

Booster popped his head over the edge of the hole. A curse ripped from his throat. His legs jerked up sharply beneath him and he sprang out of the hole, racing for the telephone man who now lay prostrate, face down, just inside the edge of the wheat field. He had covered twenty meters of the fifty that separated him from his objective when machine gun fire seared the ground around him. Booster zig-zagged—straightened—then zigzagged again, while the bullets whined and snapped around him. Something knocked his feet sidewise and he pitched headlong into the wheat.

Back in the hole Horse cursed and prayed in the same breath, and gathered himself for a dash as Booster fell.

But Booster turned a dirt-crusted face towards him and wigwagged an okay signal pointing to the ripped-off heel of his shoe. Then, without taking it off the dead man's body, he hooked up the test phone, and half fearfully, spun the crank.

An answering click told him the line was still in.

"Ragabone!" Booster snapped, giving the telephone code name of his regimental artillery headquarters.

"Ragabone," the operator's distant voice announced faintly over the wire.

"Operations!" Booster waited.

"Ragabone. Operations," a new and unhurried voice said.

"Sergeant Doane, B Battery, on special detail with Mr. Cloud. *Original situation.* Principle focus of demolition fire right on enemy main line. Two batteries firing *short* on our men at west end of small valley fronting enemy main line. Black smoke bomb signal was to raise *short* fire only. Resume main focus of demolition fire as before signal—our infantry now exposed."

"Hang on," the telephone clicked.

Through seconds that dragged like weary hours Booster strained the telephone receiver to his ear. Around him the world had become one endless racketing rattle of machine guns blazing from the relieved enemy trenches.

A distant click sounded in the telephone. Booster tensed, listening.

A new voice, stiff and passionless, rapped against his ear. "Stand by! Observe effect of fire," it said.

Booster's spirit soared. For a long heartbreaking moment he waited breathlessly for the first shells of the readjusted concentration to send up geysers of dirt and smoke from the German positions. In a few seconds the whole enemy trench system was enveloped in a shrieking maelstrom of shell fire. The racketing roar of machine guns slackened.

"Right on," Booster reported. "No short fire in sight."

"Check," the mechanical voice came flatly through the receiver. "Report action taken to Mr. Cloud."

"Right, sir."

A series of sharp clicks told him connection had been terminated.

Booster rolled over. Three waves of attacking infantry were closing rapidly on the woods. A wing of the attacking force crashed through the broken wheat behind Booster. He turned his head as the infantry moved in on him. A hard-faced officer, walking pistol in hand in advance of his men, paused and shouted

harshly at the unexpected sight.

"What the hell are you doing here?"

"Artillery contact," Booster yelled back. "I just got that goddam concentration back where it belongs."

"Good man," the officer grinned, drawing his lips back from strong white teeth that gleamed against the leathery brown of his face. The advancing infantry, rifles at the port, glanced incuriously at Booster and continued in grim silence toward their goal.

Suddenly Booster stiffened and a puzzled frown spread across his face. "Damn queer," he muttered suspiciously. That rocket—solving nothing, releasing the machine guns! His thoughts spurred him into action. Stripping the dead man of wire-reel and telephone, he slung the stuff on his own shoulders, and at a crouching run, lumbered awkwardly uphill to the hole where Horse sourly awaited him.

"Something is phony!" he panted tumbling into the hole.

"Sure," said Horse. "You are! Any guy who runs out in the open like you did is plain batty."

"Who fired that rocket?" Booster demanded.

"Who do you think fired it?" Horse countered peevishly. "I ain't a fortune teller."

"Little Mike had the rockets and the rocket pistol," Booster said, as if putting a question to himself.

"And Cloud was giving the orders. So what?" Horse spat brown disgust into the bottom of the hole.

"Why should Cloud order that rocket fired?" Booster insisted. "He knew damn well it would expose our infantry."

"Maybe he lost his nerve. Maybe Mike pulled a boner."

"You know damn well Mike didn't pull any boner. Not that kind. If he let that rocket go it was on orders, and I bet he squawked against doing it, too."

"Mike is like you," Horse said, "always trying to make up the officers' minds for them."

"If Cloud ordered the rocket fired he's balmy," Booster went on. "If he didn't order it fired why did Mike fire it? I smell something rotten."

"So if you don't stay an artillery sergeant instead of trying to be Sherlock Holmes," Horse said with dry sarcasm, "you'll do your smelling in the calaboose. Anyway we got to get that telephone line forward to Cloud."

"To hell with Cloud. I'm going to hold it here."

"For cripe's sake, Booster! You can't do that!" There was real alarm in Horse's voice.

"That was the second infantry attacking force that just now went into the woods. Cloud is down there. His job is to get that concentration of fire out of the way when the infantry is ready to assault."

"Maybe he's bumped off," Horse said hopefully.

"I'm going to sit tight," Booster said stubbornly. "He sent up one 'lengthen range' signal that nearly wrecked the works. Let him send one up when it's needed. Besides I told an officer who I was. A whole platoon heard me. Let them send back here if they want service from the artillery."

A moment later, bursting clear black above the ragged woods, a black smoke bomb bloomed.

"Hot dog!" Horse yelped. "Thar she blows!"

The phone in Booster's hands clicked as he spun the crank. Now the moment was right.

"Doane confirming black smoke signal. Infantry moving to assault. Lengthen range of fire concentration," he reported tersely.

"Check!" The distant voice was unhurried.

Booster dropped the phone to watch.

Already the holocaust of American shell fire was "walking." It moved, an earth-shaking curtain, off the German trenches to wreck and devastate the ground behind them. As he watched, a

wave of olive-drab figures with bayoneted rifles held low swept from the concealment of the woods, and in the face of briskly crackling rifle fire mounted the slight slope at the double. Another wave swarmed after them. The first wave dived headlong among the coal scuttle helmets of the German riflemen defending their shattered positions.

Booster slid back with a sigh of satisfaction.

"It's all over but the shouting," he said fishing a cigarette from a pocket.

"Yeah?" Horse shifted into a more comfortable position and scowled. "Y'better wait till Lord Marmaduke High Hat Cloud gets through speaking his piece about the telephone line that did not arrive."

"You are worse than the itch," Booster drew deeply on his cigarette.

A whistle shrilled sitting them both bolt upright.

Horse rose first and looked outside the hole. He raised his hand in a brief gesture of recognition.

"It's Cloud," he said harshly. "And Mike ain't with him!"

CHAPTER II

RAIN scoured the battle zone next day.

Blown thin by the force of a bitter wind, it flayed the marching artillery column with whips of brass.

The laboring horses, heads down against the storm, plodded sloppily through the fetlock-deep soup of yellow mud covering the road. Huddled under watersoaked waterproofs, the riders lurched to the scuffling pace of their mounts. Stolidly they ignored the bumble and thunder of guns, the shells whining to ground in the sodden fields nearby, and the sound of machine guns at work amid muck and slime, and the reek of tumid corpses coming down the wind.

The sound of a trumpet thinly piping above the rush of the rain brought forward motion, within the column, to a standstill. The horses sagged. The men slid stiffly from their saddles and fished up, with fingers chilled crooked by wet and cold and the drag of leather reins, thin crumpled cigarettes.

Horse trailed Booster as he crossed to the off-road side of the column and flung himself down on a scraggly grass patch beside a boulder. The young soldier Tracy loitered diffidently within sight and call of his hero.

"I feel like about eight cents worth of God Help Us," Booster groused.

Horse wagged his head. "Me too," he agreed glumly. "I expect Little Mike to pop up from behind every bush."

"Mike hit the trail," Booster said harshly. "That goddam shavetail did it."

"I feel as bad as you do," Horse soothed him, "Ain't the three of us bummed around together ever since when? Still, I don't exactly blame Cloud. A Kraut machine gunner got Mike's number. Y'can't blame anybody but the Kraut and maybe he'd give you a pretty good argument if he had a chance."

"Cloud told Captain Orcutt that Mike quit on him," Booster rasped. "Lost his nerve and turned snake when that short-fire spattered into the woods. It's a damned lie! Everybody in this outfit knows how Mike Scarno stuck with me when we were both hit, that time. He could have run out on me a hundred times. Instead he laid out in a shell hole half full of water with his arm busted and a gash in his head you could put your fist into, for two days and nights; and all the time I was raving mad from a clout on the dome some Kraut handed me. Do you think Mike showed yellow and let off a black smoke bomb because a few maverick shells fell near him?"

"No."

"And you are damn right; he didn't! But he's dead now, and that shavetail can slander him as much as he likes."

"You'll go off your nut if you go on broodin' about Mike," Horse argued gently. "It's tough, but he's gone and

all your squawking ain't going to bring him back."

"No." Booster's eyes glittered. "But I might give Mike a chance to even matters."

"You give me the creeps," Horse stood erect shaking his shoulders. "Y'better get up off that wet grass before you get a sore throat or a cold in your pants."

"Nuts!" Booster growled. "Give me a cigarette."

"Mine are wet," Horse looked toward Tracy. "You got any dry butts, Peter Pan?"

Tracy bounced forward.

"Sure," he grinned. "I pinched some from Lieutenant Cloud. I'm his striker now."

"You ought to be proud," Booster sneered. "Gimme a cigarette."

Tracy tossed over a crumpled package.

"Cloud rolls his own," he confided. "He rolls 'em with a little machine. They look almost as good as regular cigarettes, don't they?"

"Funny," Booster said lighting up. "I never saw him smoking. These taste pretty good."

"If you like them I'll hook a lot of them."

"All right, get them, and keep mum about it, understand?"

Tracy beamed, worshipping Booster with all the enthusiasm of his sixteen years. "Say, I'll tell you something else about Cloud."

"Yeah." Booster's eyes sharpened. "What is it, kid?"

"He's got a—a kind of a metal tube. It's like a thing I saw in a hospital once that had a needle inside for giving dope to people."

"Does he use it?" Booster queried sharply.

"I only saw it once. I walked into his dugout. It was right after all you guys came back from the infantry. He had this thing in his hands and when I walked in he hid it, and he bawled me out. I figure he must have been giving himself a shot. Huh? Sure looked like it."

"Maybe he is a hophead!" Booster said thoughtfully. "What do you think, Horse?"

"What difference does it make," Horse growled. "He's an officer, ain't he?"

"He's got the bars and everything, but I don't think he's so hot," Tracy contributed judicially.

"You birds better quit sounding off," Sergeant Mushhead Breemer's voice coming from the on-road side of the column put a sudden period to their mirth. "Go tend to your horses, Tracy! And you, Parsons, ought to know better than to stand by when an offcer is being panned."

"Nobody was being panned," Horse lied flatly.

"Tracy was laying into Lieutenant Cloud," Mushhead insisted.

Horse laughed and looked at Booster. "You got Tracy wrong, Mushhead," he said with mock gravity. "We was talkin' about you."

"Gettin' smart with me, wise guy?" Mush lowered his chunky head bull-fashion, his chin stuck out like a blunt ram, and he scowled.

"Just before you came snooping along quiet-like," Horse went on with a saccharine smile, "I was saying how tough it was that a smart guy like Sergeant Mushhead Breemer wasn't in Army Intelligence pussyfooting around to find out what the soldiers was up to."

"Oh, ya was, was ya?" Mush bellowed, crossing to the off-road side of the column where Horse stood.

"And before that," said Booster cutting in coldly from his place on the ground, "*I* said *I* thought a certain bird was a welcher and a bully."

Mushhead, seeing Booster for the first time, stopped short and shifted uncertainly from one foot to the other.

"Meaning me?"

"Meaning you!" Booster insulted him coldly. "I don't like bullies and I don't like welchers. See?"

"Pretty sour since your pal Mike

turned yellow an' took a ticket, ain't ya?" Mushhead sneered vindictively.

Horse's fist balled up and he started for Mush; but Booster got there first, coming up off the ground as if propelled by steel springs. This was merely an eager continuation. In one continuous motion he flung Horse aside and slapped Mushhead's jaws with his open hand. The big sergeant swung at Booster's head—and the fight was on.

DESPITE the handicap of waterproof coats and the slippery yellow mud underfoot they went for one another with the ferocity of men in whom antagonism has smouldered too long.

Standing toe to toe they swapped punches which shook them both to the heels. Mushhead fought silently. His heavy face was lined with the effort he made to concentrate on the furiously slashing fists of Booster Doane. Booster, with his week-old bitterness adding fuel to his dislike of Mush Breemer's eternal bullying, hammered and slammed at Mush's bovine face with fierce exultation.

"Stand up and fight, you lying wart!" he grated as Mush gave ground before the fury of his attack. Mushhead replied with a heavy jab that snapped Booster's head back. Booster came back, snapping across an overhand blow that glanced off Mush's eye and raked skin from his nose.

The uproar attracted a squalling crowd of men. They jumped up and down, pummelled each other's backs, and howled with glee. None of them noticed the swarthy-faced lieutenant who pushed through the crowd until he was beside the fighters.

Cloud's slate gray eyes were cold as he abruptly reached out, caught Booster's backdrawn arm, and spun him around.

The blow which Booster was in the act of uncorking on Mushhead snapped instead to Cloud's jaw, logically and naturally—and instantly. The smack of knuckles on bone barely preceded the smack of Cloud's rear-end as he abruptly sat down in the yellow slop coating the road.

The spectators roared appreciation, then stilled suddenly. A dozen pairs of hands advanced hesitatingly to assist the officer to his feet. But the first stunning effect of the blow having passed, Cloud arose unaided. Drawing his slight body rigidly erect, in cold fury he faced Booster.

Booster saluted smartly.

"I struck you accidentally, sir," he said in his best military manner. "I am sorry."

"Your explanation will be heard by a court martial board," Cloud said icily.

Booster's eyes grew cold with hate. To conceal it he lifted them from Cloud's face and stared bleakly across the storm swept fields.

"I shall press charges at the earliest moment," Cloud went on. "Who started *this* affair?"

"A difference of opinion between Sergeant Breemer and me started it," Booster replied.

"Breemer," said Cloud, ignoring Booster, "what caused this affair?"

Mush straightened his battered bulk and saluted clumsily.

"Well, sir," Mush stalled heavily, shooting an embarrassed glance at Booster, "I was kidding about Scarno—"

"Never mind that!" Cloud said sharply. "Was Sergeant Doane expressing unfavorable opinions of something —or somebody?"

"Well, sir. I don't—"

"Was he? Yes or no. Come, speak up." Cloud's voice crackled.

"Well, sir—" Mush cleared his throat noisily.

"As a matter of fact, Breemer, he was talking about me! Wasn't he?" Cloud prompted.

"Doane wasn't—you see—" Mush struggled for words.

"Get back to your section, Breemer," Cloud spat angrily. "You, Doane, report

to Captain Orcutt as soon as the guns are in position. The rest of you get back to your stations. Quick!"

Booster saluted stiffly, and Cloud precisely returned the courtesy. The men drifted away, muttering. Cloud whacked his boot with his riding crop and walked briskly toward the head of the column.

"Boy, howdy!" Horse chuckled, when Cloud had passed beyond earshot. "That shavvie loves you like a younger brother, now."

"The rotten little poodle," Booster said contemptuously. "What's he afraid of? Tell me that."

"Who is afraid? Him—Cloud?"

"Yeah, Cloud. He's afraid maybe I got something on him."

"Sink it, Booster," Horse laughed. "You're getting daffier by the minute."

"Am I?" Booster's glance bored into Horse's eyes. "Suppose I think Cloud pumped Mike off himself? That's a crazy idea, isn't it?"

"Listen—"

"It's crazy, isn't it?" Booster demanded.

"Sure, anybody can see that," Horse agreed peevishly.

"Certainly," Booster's eyes glittered with mirthless laughter. "It's crazy. Cloud said Mike went yellow—not in a real pinch, mind you, but just because things were tight for awhile. That's crazy, too—and Cloud knows it's crazy. When did you ever know Mike Scarno to lose his nerve? Answer me that?"

"Okay—okay," Horse evaded impatiently. "And you up and slam Cloud's chops right before everybody. Is *that* crazy? Boy, Howdy!"

"I'm going down the line with him." Booster's mouth hardened grimly.

"Oh, no, you ain't!" Horse answered him in a facetious singsong voice. "Because youre going to warm a board bunk in the can from now on."

"Says you!" Booster flipped the reins over the head of his horse as the trumpet sounded thinly on the wind, and swung into his saddle.

Horse mounted and drew alongside.

"Onward, Christian Soldiers," he muttered. "Listen to that Fourth of July celebration ahead of us. Maybe you won't go to jail after all," he said with a grim smile.

CHAPTER III

THE PUSH developed rapidly. Artillery, infantry, tanks, and miscellaneous auxiliary troops jammed the roads by night, and packed every hamlet and copse by day. Guns thundered. The sky flamed and flickered. Machine guns rattled from bloody dawn to bloody dawn. The armies swayed in deadly embrace across shell-wracked villages and fields. Blood ran in the gutters and soaked darkening into the leaf-mold of the countryside.

Night of the fifth day was a red-eyed nightmare about the battery when Captain Orcutt summoned Sergeant Booster.

Hard-faced, gray and grim, Captain Orcutt brusquely confronted him in the clammy dugout that served as command post. A lob-sided candle guttered on a tin can stuck in a niche in the dirt wall behind him. Its light set grimy shadows to groping about the walls and illumined Booster's face with a wavering murky glow. The faces of Orcutt, and of Lieutenant Cloud who stood, as accuser, beside the captain, were shrouded in gloom.

Outside, the guns of the battery, sinking deeper in a quagmire of black ooze that had once been a pretty woodland glen, methodically hurled explosives and gas upon an invisible enemy. Death whispered among the gun crews. The path of glory was crowded with Pilgrims.

Below, in the dugout, tiny avalanches of damp earth slid silently from the walls.

"This is serious business, Doane," Orcutt said coldly. "You won't deny that you struck Lieutenant Cloud with your fist?"

"No, sir," Booster was crisply respectful.

"Or that you have freely criticised Mr.

Cloud's personality and military acumen?" Orcutt seemed to savor the words as if he found some faintly bitter quality in them agreeable.

"No, sir," Booster's tone was uncompromising.

To Orcutt, Booster Doane was no mystery. His faults were visible and at times annoying. His qualities were equally definite though obscurred by the natural reticence of the man. Heretofore, Booster had always, much to Orcutt's secret relief, glibly talked himself out of trouble. But here he is, Orcutt thought with some exasperation, admitting everything like a damned recruit!

"No alibis, Sergeant?" he said with soft sarcasm.

"No, sir." A faint note of defiance crept into Booster's tone.

"This man is incorrigible," Cloud interrupted malignantly. "He should be confined for the good of the service."

"Quite likely," Orcutt agreed.

"His latest obsession," Cloud went on, "is that some mystery surrounds the death of Private Scarno. When Scarno was exposed to danger he went to pieces —became, in fact, quite violent—crazy. Unfortunately a machine gun bullet stopped him before he could be brought to trial for cowardice."

"That's a damned—!" Booster burst out, then caught himself.

Cloud's veiled eyes blazed at him across the murky flame of the candle. Booster's gaze met his, hate for hate, and the muscle ridging the sides of his jaw slowly stood forth. The air was electric with passion.

"Well!" said Orcutt, who had not missed any detail of that moment, quietly. "It's a damned what, Sergeant?"

"Nothing, sir," Booster muttered stubbornly.

"If you will pardon me, Captain," Cloud smoothly concealed his wrath. "Must we go on with this—er—conference? The man admits his guilt and I have already prepared the papers necessary to trial."

"If *you* will pardon me, Mr. Cloud?" Orcutt suggested in a voice that matched Cloud's for suavity.

Cloud bit his lips with suppressed anger.

"What is on your mind, Doane?" Orcutt queried almost kindly. "You know as well as I that a court martial board can crucify you."

"I know that," Booster said.

"Yet you openly admit striking Lieutenant Cloud?" The note of wonder in Orcutt's voice said plainly, "Think up a story, you damned idiot!"

"It was an accident," Booster explained stiffly. "I explained that to the lieutenant, sir."

"I—" Cloud began.

Orcutt waved him to be silent.

"I did not understand that," Orcutt said, "but after all," he went on with faint scorn, "that is a pretty thin excuse."

"It was an accident," Booster stated. "Somebody caught my arm from behind and I swung. Who wouldn't? It turned out to be the lieutenant, sir."

"Caught your arm from behind?" Orcutt prompted as though uncertain whether Booster's long delayed alibi was, after all, a true story.

"Yes, sir; and spun me around without warning. He got what was ready for Breemer."

"I see. And what about this loose talk you have been making?"

"I have nothing to say, sir," Booster's chin came forward.

"Scarno quit cold, Doane," Orcutt said quietly. "The reason seems obvious."

Booster's eyes blazed.

"You knew Mike, sir. Mike was a tough little wop, with guts enough to outfit an army. He didn't quit. Do you think he laid down?"

Orcutt hesitated before he spoke.

"Certain facts, Sergeant, have been established," he said not unkindly. "Furthermore one man more or less is a small

thing—in a military sense. I sympathize with your grief about Scarno's death. At the same time I wish to point out that we are up to our necks in a war, and have no time for vain regrets about men, or affairs, that are finished. Understand?"

"Yes, sir," Booster answered.

"You struck an officer," Orcutt continued concisely. "For that I shall reduce you one grade, to corporal. An order will be prepared. You will continue as chief of the third gun section. Any complaint?"

"No, sir."

"This is a most irregular proceeding, sir," Cloud objected.

"Press your charges when we are in billets again," Orcutt addressed him curtly.

"Until now," Cloud's tone was wintry and distant, "I thought I understood my duty."

"Until now you have not forgotten to whom you were speaking," Orcutt said without heat. "This man is of more use to the American Army at a gun station than as a prisoner in a stinking jail at St. Nazaire or Bordeaux. Therefore, sir, press your charges when we are out of the present mess. I will consider my endorsement of your charges at that time." He paused, then said curtly, "Send an orderly for Sergeant Breemer, Mr. Cloud, we have a serious matter to consider."

MUSHHEAD descended the dugout steps close on the heels of the orderly.

"Breemer," said Orcutt drily, "we've been discussing Doane's assault upon Mr. Cloud. This affair apparently grew out of a slugging match between you and Doane. From now on I advise you to mind your own business. As for you, Doane, don't be so promiscuous with your fists. And now to work."

Orcutt arose and leaned over the map spread out on his table.

"Regimental Operations have assigned us a dirty job. We are to send two guns to a spot in advance of the present infantry positions to demolish a machine gun nest. Mr. Cloud will command the mission." Orcutt favored Cloud with a brief professional nod. "You two men, with your gun sections, will accompany him." Orcutt's keen glance flashed around the group.

Cloud's face was a dark rigid mask. Mushhead stared intently at Orcutt. On Booster's face the faintest suggestion of a bitter smile flickered in the depths of his eyes as they met Orcutt's, then moved on to fasten their gaze on the roof beams of the dugout.

"Take a look at this map." Orcutt indicated a point on the map as the three men gathered about him. "Briefly, a chain of machine gun nests, having fields of fire which overlap, are strongly emplaced along this line of hills. The guns are housed in thick re-enforced concrete pillboxes, which in turn are sunk deeply in the hillside. For two days our infantry has been launching frontal attacks to no purpose. Interlacing fire from the various nests makes successful assault by infantry impossible. Furthermore the nests are placed so as to present great difficulty to artillery operating against them. In short each of these nests is a small fortress placed with a military cunning which approaches genius."

Mushhead cleared his throat nervously. With his intense blue eyes alight Booster followed Orcutt's every word and movement. In silence Cloud bowed his dark, expressionless face over the map.

"But!" Orcutt paused. "But!" he repeated with grim triumph. "Just here," he placed the point of his pencil on the map, "infantry combat patrols under the command of a Lieutenant Lovejoy—since killed—found a small depression in the hillside some twenty feet across. Please observe that this particular hill forms a sort of butte leading towards our lines. This bulge of the hillside makes

crossfire from the flanking nests ineffective within two hundred meters. Thus —if we can place guns in this slight depression they will be almost directly in front of the nest we wish to destroy and at the same time will be safe from crossfire which, if it could be brought to bear, would render our plan infeasible.

"Our problem is simple and hazardous," he continued quietly. "Two guns with twenty rounds of high explosive ammunition per gun will be put into position tonight. Once in place they will remain quiet until dawn. The earliest instant daylight exposes the target, both guns will fire at point blank range, delayed fuse, twenty rounds of high explosive shell."

Orcutt paused. In the silence the guns overhead thumped dully; the dugout jarred and the candleflame wavered, sending a long streamer of reddish smoke toward the crossbeams of the roof.

"The entire party will be wiped out before a shot can be fired," Cloud's slightly metallic voice broke the silence. "These nests should be reduced by indirect fire."

"Normally, yes," said Orcutt. "But aerial scouts report the enemy preparing for a stand a few kilometers behind this machine gun defense. Given twenty-four hours more to prepare, he will give us a man-sized job when we come up to his positions. For this reason the possible sacrifice of two gun sections—mark I say, possible—is a small price to pay—if we breach this defense system and force the enemy to abandon his half-completed defenses further back, or to fight in them. Minimum damage to the gun crews will be sustained if, with the first splinter of daylight, fire is prompt and effective—and by that I mean—well directed. Do you understand all of you? *Well directed!* Any foozling of this detail will earn you all a prolonged assignment of graveyard detail. Any questions?"

"How do we move the guns?" said Booster.

"Horses up to the infantry positions," Orcutt replied. "From that point by hand. Incidentally, infantry headquarters has agreed to supply guides and to throw a screen of combat patrols ahead to clear your path of German patrols."

"What about flares?" Breemer said, looking uncertainly from one to the other. "A gun will look big as a mountain under a light."

"Infantry reports the approach of your hill as lying across a small plain or meadow," Orcutt reassured him. "At one end of it there is a small body of water—an old mill pond or some such thing. At night a heavy ground mist obscures everything. Flares are ineffective in the fog. Our infantry depends for safety upon extra listening posts and combat patrols."

"This mist will not go high enough to obscure visibility from the machine gun nest?" Cloud's question was half a statement.

"It goes higher," Orcutt replied. "Combat patrols report heavy fog at night near the enemy position. Mr. Cloud, you will assemble such data as you deem necessary," he went on briskly. "Sergeants Doane, Breemer, see that your men know what they are up against and that your guns are in A-1 shape."

Orcutt looked around the group. "I am not asking for volunteers," he said curtly, "because I do not believe in shilly-shallying or penny opera heroics. I have my orders, and you have yours. Pass them on. That's all."

CHAPTER IV.

THE YOUNGSTER Tracy intercepted Booster as he circled the low roof mound of Orcutt's dugout and headed for his gun.

"I got some more cigarettes for you." Tracy confided in a loud shout that barely reached Booster through the pervading din.

Booster's hand shot out and Tracy put a package of cigarettes in it.

"I pinched the whole pack out of the foot-locker," he said. "They're all his very special brand."

Booster's fingers closed around the package and he thumped Tracy's shoulder.

"How's for a job on your gun, Sarge?" Tracy shouted.

"Sure." Booster bobbed his head in agreement. "As soon as this mess is over."

"Okay." Tracy squeezed Booster's arm and went back into Cloud's dugout.

Booster hesitated a moment, fingering the package of cigarettes; then he darted into a nearby battery dugout.

Inside, this dugout was no different from that occupied by Orcutt save that it was larger, and its soggy atmosphere was heavy with the odor of unwashed men.

After a quick glance around, Booster spilled the cigarettes into his hand. One of them he split endwise, letting the tobacco fall to the floor. His hand shook a little as he placed the wisp of paper remaining close to the candle flame.

His fingers throbbed and stung from the heat. He set his teeth resisting the pain while his eyes, fastened on the wisp of paper, narrowed with concentration.

Suddenly he crouched closer, his eyes dilated.

The dead white paper was showing a faint tracery in reddish sepia. Booster's breath hissed between his teeth. In an access of eagerness he thrust the paper closer to the flame.

With a little puff it ignited, and in an instant was consumed.

Booster swore. But his eyes gleamed, and he laughed—a short strange bark that was a blend of pure joy and savagery.

In a moment the mood had passed, and he was up the stairs and hurrying across the position toward his gun.

"Holy Moses!" Horse yelped when his truant section chief poked him in the ribs. "Cloud is ready to dig up a firing squad to shoot you with. Where the cripe have you been all this time?"

Booster replied in two words and a gesture which eloquently expressed his opinion.

"Yeah?" Horse nodded. "Me too! But boy, oh boy, does he crave a strip of your hide!"

"I'm going to hang his whole hide up to dry," Booster shouted confidently.

A shell screamed, shattering against the ground a few yards away. Steel splinters and stones lashed the air.

"Red Cross man!" The hail came from the next section.

Booster bounced erect to find that Cloud had materialized out of the flame-shot darkness.

For an instant officer and soldier faced each other. Bitter hatred lay between them.

"You will be ready to pull out at two o'clock," Cloud ordered in a tone that dripped poison, and turning on his heel he strode away.

A second shell crashed—followed by two more. A man screamed.

"I'll be ready," Booster gritted. He wrenched a quid of tobacco from a torn plug. A tornado of enemy fire closed on the battery.

AT TWO-THIRTY that morning a stolidly plodding two-gun column under the command of Lieutenant Cloud moved forward to carry out its hazardous mission. Around it, guns slammed and clanged, shells screamed overhead; and bursting, tore burning holes in the night. War fires flamed red and yellow or flashed like summer lightning along the horizon. Great mushrooms of pale light bloomed against the flame-ridden sky; then slowly faded, exposing again the blazing shuttlecock of war spinning to and fro across the heavens.

Slightly in advance of the column, and alone with his thoughts, Cloud led out on foot.

Behind him the gun crews, following their horse-drawn guns, stumbled wear-

ily through the sticky black mud that formed a deeply rutted track across the flat plateau.

"You want to know something," Horse said hoarsely, as they tramped side by side holding fast to a hand-grip on their lumbering gun.

"Yeah."

"That pinktailed baby is with us."

"Tracy?"

"Yeah, Tracy. Cloud sent him."

"Where is he?" Booster called sharply, "Tracy!"

"Right here, Sergeant," Tracy popped out of the darkness not five feet behind Booster.

"Come here. Who assigned you to this brawl?"

"I asked Cloud, and he said it was a good idea. You ain't sore, are you?"

"Never mind. You do as you're told, understand?" Booster grumbled unreasonably.

"Yes, sir. I didn't—"

"Shut up!" Booster snapped. "And keep up under the gun-shield when we get into the open. Mind, if I catch you outside the wheels, I'll kick your slats in."

"Okay, Sarge. Don't worry."

"Hear what I say, Horse?" Booster's voice was harsh. "Keep this kid back of the shield."

"Hell of a note!" Horse muttered sourly. "Ain't there any men left in the States? Next thing it will be gocarts instead of tanks, and a big battle of hot milk squirted at the enemy."

"I can hold up my end," Tracy defended himself stoutly.

"Yeah?" Horse spat with blistering sarcasm. "Well, hold it up then, and take it home to the sand pile where it belongs."

"Pipe down, Horse!" Booster said tersely. "And, don't take him too seriously, Tracy. You do as I've told you. That's all. Go back to your place."

"Yes, sir." Tracy was all submission, yet with eagerness.

"Get this, Horse!" Booster said earnestly after Tracy left. "I think I got enough on Cloud to hang him, but I didn't have time to make sure. Also I figure this shindig is a good time for him to try some of his fancy tricks."

"You mean you got something *on* Cloud?"

"Yeah. If I check out there is an envelope in my pocket that goes to Orcutt. Tell him I destroyed one cigarette paper heating it by an open candle, and that he must question the kid Tracy about Cloud's cigarette making."

"What's this business?"

"Lemon juice," said Booster succinctly.

"Waddya mean, lemon juice?" Horse grunted.

"Once when I was a little tyke about twelve years old I had a crush on a little girl. We exchanged notes written in lemon juice. In order to read the message you heat the paper and the writing shows a brownish color."

"So Cloud carries lemons around, huh?"

"He carries a thin metal tube with a writing outfit and a chemical in it that acts the same as lemon juice. Tracy saw him use it."

"Holy Moses!" Horse choked. "What are you going to do, Booster?"

"Sit tight, and try to catch him. Keep your eyes open and let me know of anything at all that doesn't seem right to you."

"Okay. Jeez, can y'imagine that?" Horse breathed incredulously. "Say!" he yelped suddenly. "I bet he scragged Mike!"

"The old cow s tail goes—switch—switch—switch," said Booster slowly, acidly.

CLOSE ahead of the advancing guns the hard white light of hissing flares illumined a mist bank swirling up from below the plateau level. A bedlam of machine-gun fire marked the presence of infantry in the fog below.

"That must be our valley-meadow," Horse commented. "Listen to that infantry, will you?"

"That's the place all right," Booster agreed tartly. "It's the valley where we'll be sleeping by request. Our infantry must be entrenched along the side of the hill; there's a wood down there, I guess. Where in hell is the guide they were going to give us?"

As if in answer to his remark, Cloud's voice rose thinly from the head of the column, ordering a halt.

"I'll be back," Booster snapped.

Covered by darkness, he walked rapidly forward until he stood a few paces from Cloud, listening.

An infantry officer was talking with him.

"There's a good deal of disturbance just now," the infantry officer was saying. "Can't say just why. However a strict 'cease fire' order has been given to our men. These things die down very quickly."

"Where are your positions?" Cloud asked.

"On the hillside overlooking the meadow. There is good cover down there and we pull most of our men back up here when this damned mist clears in the morning."

"That seems wise," Cloud complimented the officer politely.

"It seems to work very well," the officer agreed pleasantly.

During the next ten minutes Booster stood in the darkness listening while the officers chatted and shells roared high above their heads. The racket of machine guns and rifles gradually slackened; then died away all together. The flares popping hectically into view above the steaming mist lessened, until only an occasional one lighted the snaky wisps of vapor curling upward from the meadow.

At last Cloud shouted, "Forward!"

Booster dropped back to watch his gun as the horses, straining forward, hauled it creaking and rumbling across a shell torn field studded with thorny bushes. Presently they struck a rocky track which descended, twisting, through shattered, stench-filled, woods.

At a roughly level place in the road the column halted. Booster again went forward.

"Major Nyal," the infantry officer said. "Lieutenant Cloud is in command."

"All right." A heavy voice boomed out of the darkness. "Here's the layout, Mr. Cloud. We will send out combat patrols as soon as you are ready to go. We will put a competent sergeant-guide with your party. All units in this sector know that you are moving ahead to them and will reserve fire except for utmost emergency. We will also supply extra men to help you move your guns and ammunition."

"Not necessary," Cloud said in his precise way. "I think we can handle things all right."

"Good spirit," Nyal boomed approvingly. "But I insist upon supplying extra hands. You must reach your objective quickly and silently. In this case the answer is many hands. In other words you can't go puffing and wheezing across that open meadow with half enough men to handle things if you bog down or meet trouble of some kind."

Cloud's reply was lost to Booster as Nyal boomed a volley of brisk orders.

The scrape of nail-studded boots marked the combat patrols and helpers filing out of the woods.

Booster drifted back to his gun. "Not so fast," he said abruptly as a dozen men clumsily laid hold of the gun. "Get to work on the wheels."

"All right, Doane," Cloud's voice commanded flatly. "Lead out."

"Lead out?" Horse hissed. "Is that guy hoping the greensward will softly fold us? Boy, I'm askin' you!"

"Somebody has to lead," Booster replied grimly. "Unshackle the limber and let's go."

The horse-drawn limber pulled away and the heavy gun, now man-handled,

trundled ponderously forward.

"Follow the guide," Cloud snapped as Booster came abreast of him.

Booster did not reply.

A second later Mushhead grasped his arm in the dark and fell into step behind him.

"Booster," he said in a whisper.

"Yeah?" Booster smothered his surprise.

"This guy Cloud must be nuts," Mushhead confided heavily.

"Why?" Booster countered warily. "He's a *nice* guy."

"Yeah, but what's his idea turning down help? Don't he know movin' guns by hand, practically down Heinie's throat, is a tough job?"

"What do you care. I am the one who goes down Heinie's throat first."

"That part is all right with me," Mushhead grunted crabbedly. "Still I been thinkin'," he growled, "we ought to quit scrappin' all the time."

"For tonight anyway," Booster agreed promptly, and added, "there's plenty of grief ahead of us."

"Absolutely."

"Okay." Their hands groped together in the darkness. "I'm taking you at your word, Mush," Booster said concisely. "If you let me down I'll climb all over you."

"Shut up and listen to me," he snapped as Mushhead began a rumbled protest. "Keep your eyes peeled for phony plays."

"Whaddayamean?" Mushhead whispered.

"My oath. I'll tip you off if I find out anything more. Agreed?"

"Yeah—sure, but—"

"Not a word to anyone then. Check your gun and ammunition for fouling, and be careful who stands behind you."

"Behind me?" Mushhead questioned, completely baffled. "You mean Cl—"

"Shut up," Booster hissed, "and don't forget what I—"

"Sergeant Breemer!" Cloud's muted hail came to them.

"Beat it!" Booster muttered fiercely.

Mushhead moved away towards Cloud's voice.

Presently Cloud called again, and Mushhead's voice cut across his call.

"Here, sir."

"Pull out." said Cloud.

Booster heard the grind of Mushhead's gun-wheels on the gravelly track behind him.

"Did you say something about pushing up daisies?" Booster whispered, locating Horse in the dark.

"Daisies or dandelions," Horse growled sourly. "Our boy friend is set on us getting a dusting."

"I tipped Mushhead off."

"Mushhead!" Horse groaned. "Now, I know you got feathers in your brain. Why, he's a friend of Cloud's."

"Maybe," said Booster. "But don't forget Mush and the guys in his section have a right to a break too."

"And you a good poker player," Horse grieved. "Any day now you will take to face-up show-down for a half a cent limit."

"If I did," Booster laughed, "I'd still dent your bankroll on payday."

An enemy machine gun bit redly into the darkness ahead of them. The deadly racket echoed and re-echoed through the valley like the flat crash of thunder.

"That's our pal," the guide said drily.

"How do you know?" said Booster.

"I know," the guide replied. "Course, you can't see nothin' account of this damned mist—but that's our little Hansy, all right. I'd know his popgun anywhere. From now on it's tiptoe and nothing above a whisper. You better tell your guys."

Silence hovered over the American lines. The meadow, smelling faintly of wet grass and the sickish effluvia of death, was like a tomb. Surrounded by utter deathlike stillness the guns moved into the open meadow. Between them and the deadly spray of the German machine gun nest lay mist—nothing else.

Suddenly the machine gun ahead racketed. Bullets ricocheting from the gun-shield of Booster's gun struck sparks into the night. One man fell away silently from his post at a wheel. The storm passed in a breath. The men rose from their half-crouch and rolled the wheels over again. The fallen man sucked in a few strangled breaths and then became one with the stillness. The gun moved inexorably toward its goal.

"Strike one!" Horse whispered grimly.

ON THEY went. Booster watched the radium dial of the wrist watch strapped to the underside of his arm. The tiny second hand ticked busily around and around. The larger hands moved from three o'clock to three-fifteen—then three-thirty. Every time the gun bumped into a hole Booster's nerves stood out like twigs. The men breathed heavily, throwing their weight into the task of moving two tons of steel and copper through a soggy pasture.

"Doane?" the guide whispered at last.

"Here."

"We are almost to the hill. In a few minutes we'll be looking down the barrels of Herr Heinie Hindenburg's hardware. Pass the word."

The word went back in faint whispers, passed furtively from mouth to ear.

Beneath his feet, Booster felt the softness of the meadow give way to harder ground as it lifted toward the invisible hillside.

Suddenly a prickle of warning rose through Booster. He listened. The air was electric with suspense. He felt the brittle suspicion of other men touching him.

"Down!" he hissed, dropping to the turf.

Ahead and silently above him machine guns stuttered nervously—quieted—then whacked out several short bursts. The bullets whanged overhead; a few bit into the ground with a sharp *sput!* The gun stopped short; then stuttered sullenly again.

It reminded Booster of a dog which suddenly lifts its head from a hearth-rug, and with nose twitching, growls into a silence too profound to be natural.

"Come on," the guide whispered as the gun stuttered into silence.

On the heels of his order a voice hissed out of the dark.

"Hold up, artillery!"

"Who are you?" the rifle of the guide snicked significantly.

"Cronin, C Company," the voice whispered lightly. "Kraut patrols right ahead of ya. The looey says lay low. The Krauts are going home."

"Check!"

"Pass the word, Horse." Booster crept forward until he lay alongside the guide.

Behind him the others spread out on the ground.

The bright little second hand on the face of Booster's watch hustled silently around the dial. Dense quiet lay heavily about him. The fog touched his face with clammy fingers. Towards the German lines a string of Very lights soared, glowing coldly in the pale aura of their own light. Death was abroad in the hush. Booster set his jaw and concentrated on the dial of his watch.

Five minutes, six minutes—. Booster watched the bright little second hand gallop them off.

"Cronin?" a new voice inquired lightly from the blackness to one side.

"Here."

"All clear. Artillery move up now."

The men at the guns heaved on the wheel spokes and the guns moved slowly forward again.

"Right a little, Doane—that's good," the guide whispered a few minutes later, as the gun lurched forward over the shallow lip of the depression that was no deeper than a man's hand.

"Steady," the guide cautioned. "Here we are."

Instinctively Booster followed the lift

of the hill and swung the muzzle of his gun into line with it.

Lieutenant Cloud came up just ahead of the second gun. Without speaking he stood beside Booster at the breech of the gun, and consulted the illuminated dial of a prismatic compass couched in his hand.

"Stay here," he hissed at Booster.

Booster waited. A minute later Cloud was back.

"You are off the target," he said. "Go right one hundred mils."

"A hundred mils?" Booster whispered incredulously.

"Shift the trail now," Cloud whispered hurriedly. "You won't have time later on."

"Lieutenant Lovejoy set direction pegs before he checked out," the guide suggested.

For an instant Cloud was silent—then:

"Excellent. Where are they? You stay here, Doane, I'll go out and locate the pegs. My correction will stand until we find something better."

Booster felt them move away into the darkness.

Standing behind his gun he faced along the line of its present direction and walked forward. Beneath his feet the ground rose evenly, pressing squarely against the soles of his feet.

Then he went back to the gun, and standing as he had before, he faced to the right at what he roughly figured was an angle of one hundred mils. Again he moved forward. Now the hillside rose unevenly on his left. The pressure of the grade was all on his left foot; he was off balance, supporting his weight on the downhill right foot.

"That's not the way it was on Orcutt's map," Booster muttered.

Standing still, he recast a mental picture of the map as it lay on the table before them all in Orcutt's dugout. Again he saw the swirling contour lines indicating the narrow bulge of the hill which held the machine gun nest. The telltale contour lines lay evenly spaced to the point where this bulge closed them abruptly. The rise was straight up from the meadow. The gun should point almost along the line of the rise. "We ought to fire right into the hillside where the Kraut pillboxes are sunk," he grumbled.

The rise he felt beneath his feet was left of the direction Cloud ordered.

IF WHAT he suspected was true—Booster's teeth clenched tightly as a picture of Cloud's strategy took shape.

In the dark, Cloud would lay a direction far enough off to make necessary laborious work shifting the heavy spaded trail of the gun when daylight came—while five Kraut machine guns cut the helpless crews to pieces. If, on the other hand, the gun was approximately "on" when the target became visible, it would take only a turn or two of a wheel to correct the error.

This, then, was the set-up!

Inwardly Booster cried for a map and a light.

Cloud coming back alone broke into his reverie.

"Doane?" he whispered breathlessly, and added quickly, "I was right. At one hundred we will be only above five mils right of the line of the direction markers. Keep that in mind when the light comes."

Booster saluted mechanically in the dark. "Yes, sir," he said numbly.

He laid his hand on the gun. Booster's every instinct shrieked its protest against shifting according to Cloud's orders. He glanced miserably around him into the slowly brightening fog. His mind raced ahead, thinking things out. Fifteen minutes, maybe a few more, and the antagonists would be visible to one another. The fight would be short and sweet. If the guns were "on" in the first few seconds, their fire should panic the machine gunners and destroy their aim. Booster shivered a little as he saw

himself in the Kraut position—looking into the mouths of two belching field pieces at two hundred yards!

If the trails had to be shifted as Cloud ordered—if there was the slightest delay at that crucial instant—the crews would be mowed down like straw by the machine gunners.

Suddenly he cursed and strode off in the direction the guide and Cloud had taken a few minutes before. Then a new thought flashed into his head.

He stopped in his tracks.

An instant later he was feverishly searching the ground on both sides of his course.

He found what he was looking for when he stumbled across the feet of a soldier lying prone.

Booster dropped beside him, grasped his slack shoulders, and turned him over. He could not see the man's face. But he was sure—sure it was the guide who had gone out with Cloud!

The man groaned thickly.

Booster shook him.

"What's the trouble?" he hissed.

The man's breath wheezed through his teeth. His fingers bit into Booster's arm.

"Speak, can't you?" Booster shook him again. "This is Doane—"

"Do-Do—" the man gasped. "He—" Blood gushed over Booster's hand. "The loo-looey, he—he, *my back.*"

Booster ran his hand down the man's back into a slick of fresh blood.

"Cloud did that?"

"Ya-yeah—he—he—" The man's voice faded in a swift gurgling rush of air and blood through his teeth.

Booster dropped him.

"Must be around here," he muttered, and began crawling to and fro, feeling with his hands for the deeply driven line of pegs that would point straight at the target.

The light rising through the mist helped him but little as he groped. Sobbing, muttering half-curses through lips that dripped blood from his gnawing teeth, he swept his hands in a circle over the ground.

Then he hit one. The small peg projected an inch out of the ground. Unerringly Booster put his hands on four more. A row of five pegs straight as an arrow and pointing—?

Deliberately Booster stood erect and lined himself up with the pegs. Then he walked forward as he had a few minutes before, by his gun. The grade beneath his feet pressed evenly on the soles of both feet.

Rigidly he pressed his surging emotion back. Again he aligned himself with the pegs and faced off a rough angle to the right of one hundred mils. Again he stepped off. This time the grade pressed against his left foot. The pegs pointed straight up the grade then. Once more he suppressed the murderous rage that surged upwards in him, and forced himself to compare the line of his gun as he had roughly pointed it with the row of pegs at his feet.

The two did not differ by more than a few mils.

"At one hundred right we'd be so far to the right of the target we'd be cut to pieces before we could shift back!" Booster spoke softly as if reciting a bitterly learned lesson. "One hundred and fifteen mils left," he muttered, estimating the angle crudely. "It's close enough."

At a run he dashed through the brightening mist toward the guns.

The light was well up now. Another five minutes—

Booster burst into the circle of Mushhead's gun.

Mushhead, crouched with his crew behind the gun, jumped erect as Booster swam out of the brightening fog.

"Are you laid?" Booster whispered hoarsely.

"One hundred right," Mushhead replied quickly.

"Go one hundred fifteen left!" Booster commanded hoarsely.

"Huh?" Mushhead looked stupidly at

him. Such an order was unprecedented.

"It's a phony! Cloud, he—go left one fifteen, quick!" Booster shoved Mushhead towards the gun.

"But, look, Booster, how do you—?"

"Shift, will you!" Booster wheezed fiercely. "You've got only a minute or two."

Some of Mushhead's men heaved up on the heavy steel trail and edged it slowly around.

Suddenly Mushhead stiffened.

"I get cha!" he exploded hoarsely. "Okay—okay! It's the bum play—swing her, you guys, heave her around!"

Booster rushed on to his own gun. Ten feet behind it, clearly visible in the gray light of rising dawn, Cloud stood immobile.

"Is that gun laid right a hundred mils?" Booster cracked at Horse, ignoring Cloud.

"Yeah—Lieutenant Cloud just—"

"Go left one fifteen. Quick!"

"Leave that gun alone, Parsons!" Cloud's voice dripped venom.

Booster swung around. Cloud's pistol held them both in the narrow circle of its muzzle.

During the eternity of a split second they faced each other unmoving and silent.

"Left one fifteen!" Booster's voice crackled, at last—and he went for the pistol strapped to his leg.

Cloud's first shot tore through his arm. The second spun him off his feet. Firing from his knees, Booster's gun rapped off three shots—and jammed. Cloud fired again and missed as Horse covered Booster's sagging body. Cloud's next shot took Horse just above the belt. Horse grimaced as the bullet tore into his body, and his gun put a slug into Cloud's gun shoulder.

"I'm a pistol sharpshooter," Horse said clearly in a strange high voice. Stricken, he proved it. His gun rapped off six shots in rapid succession and Cloud's sinking body took them all.

The machine guns on the hill opened with a roar, challenging and murderous.

Horse's gun wobbled, then sagged and slipped loosely from his grasp. He turned, swaying, toward Booster; then collapsed, pitching over on his face.

Hell was loose!

The hidden machine guns filled the valley with a staccato roar. A storm of whining bullets lashed the guns.

Booster heard Mushhead's gun slam in the murk. He swung groggily towards his own piece. Already Tracy was frantically urging the crew to shift direction. Across the top of the shield Booster could see little points of fire playing from a spot higher on the hill.

"Sight through the breech," he shouted, crawling closer.

As in a dream he saw a man drop on one knee sighting the bore.

From a way off he heard a voice cry:

"She's 'dead on,' Sarge!"

"Tracy! The Kid!" went dimly through Booster's reeling senses.

"Let 'er go, kid," he said from his knees.

A burning pain was tearing him inside. His arm was a great nerveless log. His head wobbled loosely. Hands and knees on the ground, he forced his swimming eyes to focus on the gun. He saw the dull gleam of brass as the shell shot home. A crash followed — the gun belched fire and steel.

Through the rapidly dissolving veil of mist a flame-based geyser of hillside dirt blotted out the playing points of fire.

"Right on!" Booster reared back on his knees triumphantly. "Sock it to 'em! *Rapid fire!*"

The gun blasted again.

Again.

From the right, Mushhead's gun crashed, matching Booster, shot for shot.

A few hundred feet up the hill a wildly churning maelstrom of fire and steel tore the hillside to fragments.

Suddenly Tracy's high voice shrieked.

"There they go! They're smashed,

sarge! Gone to Kingdom Come!"

Where the solid hillside had resisted the shellbursts, a sudden cavern opened, exposing the shattered inside of the machine-gun nest.

Like lost souls, their hands curling upward in supplication, a lurid frieze of fear-maddened faces framed in coal-scuttle helmets swam in the smoke. An instant they hung shrieking, but unheard in the din—and then the blazing inferno engulfed them.

Hanging to the spokes of the gun-wheel, whence he had crawled instinctively, Booster's face twisted into a pain-shot grimace of satisfaction.

"Okay—okay!" he mumbled fiercely.

His arms buckled, letting him down heavily into a widening pool of his own blood.

BENEATH a loosely flopping piece of khaki tent stuff, Captain Orcutt found Booster propped against a tree.

"Doane," he said. "Can you hear me?"

"Sure." Booster gingerly opened his eyes. Pain. Dizziness. Sharp splinters of light crowded under his close held lids. "I'll see you, too," he growled, "if this damned light doesn't gouge my eyes out."

"Orderly!" Orcutt called. "See if you can darken this hutch a little."

Booster sat there. "I guess we made out all right, huh?" he muttered a few seconds later.

"Blew the nest clean out of the ground," Orcutt assured.

"Yeah," Booster nodded. He stirred, pulling himself together. "Poor ole Horse tried to cover me," he said bitterly. "And Cloud plugged him. I never knew Horse to grandstand, but after Cloud plugged him, Horse piped, 'I'm a pistol sharpshooter,' and put six shots into Cloud before Cloud hit the ground."

"Young Tracy told me about that," Orcutt said gently.

"Yeah?" Grimly Booster chuckled. "The kid is a wisenheimer. He worked that gun like he was on a parade ground." He sighed painfully. "How did he make out?"

"Oh, he's all right," Orcutt laughed. "He's been making a pest of himself ever since a couple of litter-bearers picked you up."

"Nice kid," Booster muttered. "Say, Skipper," he went on. "Horse got it sure enough, huh?"

"He's hit bad," Orcutt replied brusquely. "You know how such things are—abdominal wound, punctures, all that stuff. An even chance, I should say."

"Yeah, I know. Not so good." Booster stirred restlessly. "I got Cloud," he announced in a clear, cold voice.

"Tracy told me all about that too. You must have caught on to his game early."

"He scragged Little Mike Scarno," said Booster.

"I can see it now," Orcutt admitted. "Scarno refused to be duped into releasing a signal which would expose our whole effort to failure, and so Cloud shot him and released the signal himself."

"What about those cigarette papers?"

"Miscellaneous data concerning strength, morale, and condition, also some very interesting sketches, cleverly done. Apparently Cloud hoped to get back to his own lines but felt that the success of the German strategy depended upon the exposure and failure of our desperate effort to crash the machine gun nest, so he stayed on. He lost the game when he mistook American imagination and initiative for wilful disobedience. It's a pity we are unable to question Mr. Cloud."

"I'd like to question him," Booster murmured wickedly. "With the barrel of a pistol!"

"We are checking up on his identification papers—they probably belonged to some dead or captured officer," Orcutt said.

They were silent then for a long moment.

To Booster the moment began to

reach into eternity. Above him the rag of khaki flopped and wavered under the urge of a vagrant breeze. It seemed to float far away, to belong to the sky he saw swimming in the far off background. He felt himself sinking into a soft world. All of the sharpness faded out of his pain; and what remained of feeling flowed together into a warm obscuring mist. The brown canopy floated in a distant haze. His fingers picked at the blanket which covered him.

"So long, Skipper," he suddenly mumbled. "I got to see Mike, now—"

"Hold on!" Orcutt sprang up. 'Orderly, a needle here, quick!"

A few minutes later Booster opened his eyes.

"Trying to run out on us, Sergeant?" Orcutt grinned. "Hell of a thing to do!"

"Yeah," Booster decided, and smiled faintly.

"Hey, Sarge!"

It was the kid Tracy shaking his arm.

"Hello, Kid," Booster said. And then he grinned. "What are you selling, grabbags?"

"I just saw Mush—I mean, Sergeant Breemer, outside. He kicked my backside hard, and he said if you run out on him you are a dirty goldbrick."

"Is that so!" Booster brightened perceptibly. Life flowed in his veins. "Well, you tell that fathead I'll slap his ears off the minute I get out of the hospital."

Orcutt grinned and winked his eye at Tracy.

It is a long time now since Leonard Nason's first story made its appearance in ADVENTURE, the harbinger of a long series including some of the best War and Army stories ever inspired by the A. E. F.

Now with "Guns Up!" ADVENTURE introduces another writer new to the magazines, and hails with confidence the opening of a brilliant career. Watch for Theodore Fredenburgh's great story in the next issue!

HIGH AIR

A stark tale of men under the river's bottom

By BORDEN CHASE

DEEP under the river bed an iron monster gnawed at the muck and slime. It breathed. And great lungfuls of highly compressed air rose in gurgling bubbles through the swift moving water to burst at the surface as foaming froth. Crunching, grinding, swallowing, tearing at the sand and earth with sharp steel jaws, the gargantuan reptile slithered along. Heavy iron plates formed for it an armor that put to shame the protective coverings of prehistoric beasts. Thrusting ever deeper, forward, with irresistible force, it shuddered the earth with its efforts. The sandhogs were building a river tunnel.

Strange men these sandhogs. Strange men working at a strange trade. Above them the river moved with quiet dignity to the sea. Scurrying tug boats warped the graceful ocean liners to docks. Swift moving ferryboats panted impatient blasts at sluggish barges. Graceful bridges stretched their delicate arcs over the glistening stream, linking the boroughs of a mighty city. A pleasant world. A world of sunshine and gentle breezes, of crisp cold air that smiled

with an ever-increasing hint of spring.

Ninety feet below the shimmering surface of the river, the hollow-eyed sandhogs inhabited a different world. A world where a gale continually raged. A man-made tempest, scorching blasts of highly compressed air fed to the toilers in the tunnel. Compressed air—vile stuff that often twisted their limbs with indescribable agonies, tortured their lungs or sent them reeling, staggering into eternity. Air—sucked into the whirling compressors, pounded by the thrusting pistons until it roared through the long black pipes that led to the tunnel. Air—that sapped the very life from the sandhogs' veins. Devilish stuff, fiendish stuff—but it kept the river out.

In the company restaurant near the tunnel shaft, the stamp of heavy boots rose above the roar of many voices. Sandhogs sat at the tables or stood against the long counter at the rear of the room. Tobacco smoke hung heavy above their heads. No cleansing drafts disturbed the sluggish cloud. The windows were tightly closed and the heat danced in waves from the steam pipes along the base of the walls. The reek of wet clothes and the sweet odor of alcohol mingled with the stench of grease burning on an open range behind the counter.

The men wore heavy sheepskin coats, for the pores of their skin must be kept open to allow the compressed air to seep out of their bodies. Long woolen underwear, khaki shirts and grimy trousers thrust into high boots completed the outfit. Each table held its quota of card players and voices were loud as the bets ran high. Flasks of whiskey went round. Sudden argument flared into fight. There was that tension in the room which prevails wherever men are jealous of the flying minutes.

The tunnel was deep and forty pounds of air were holding back the river. The working time was short—one hour shifts and between them five hours in which to rest. But the sandhog's idea of rest was to live hard—live fast—drag each full measure of life from the hours of freedom. The talk was of tunnels—tunnels that had been built and rivers that had been conquered. Men shouted, laughed, and boasted. The Klondike in its wildest days never knew a gambling hell to surpass the restaurant of the sandhogs. Only the women were missing—the tunnel is a man's game.

In a far corner of the room two men faced each other across a rough wooden table. Joe Redman, veteran of many tunnels, clenched his pipe tightly between his teeth as he studied his son.

"So you had to come back, eh, kid?" he grunted. "Couldn't keep away when they put a few pounds of air on the job. Why?"

"I don't know." Steve grinned as he shuffled his empty coffee cup about the table. His eyes, when he lifted them to look at his father, were the same deep blue as the older man's. His shoulders were just as broad, his flanks as narrow. Save for a few streaks of gray in the father's hair and an indefinite touch that comes with years, they might have been brothers.

"Weren't you satisfied at school?"

"Oh, that had nothing to do with it. I liked it well enough—wanted to become an engineer—but it's the tunnel. You know, dad, it gets you."

"YES, I know. It's something I've been worrying about ever since you worked your first job. Give a man a taste of high air and that ends it. If he's born to be a sandhog, the stuff gets into his blood and there's no cure for it." He paused. The smoke from his pipe rose in a lazy cloud to join the heavy mass above. "How old were you when you first came to work in the tunnel with me?"

"Fifteen. It was during my summer vacation while I was at high school. You were out on that Detroit River job."

"Mmmm," said Joe. His blue eyes studied the boy. "Just a kid, weren't you. But you wanted to be a sandhog

like your old man—at fifteen!"

"I was big enough to handle a shovel."

"Yeah, big enough to handle a shovel—that's it. That's when I started—and your grandfather, too. Big enough to handle a shovel in the Redman family means big enough to start eating high air—big enough to get the bends, the chokes, yeah—big enough to get paralyzed and die. But I thought it was going to be different with you."

"Now look here, dad, you're not going through all that stuff again, are you?"

"No, I guess not. It wouldn't do any good. You're here, you have made up your mind to go sandhogging again and that's that. Now there is only one question.

"What?"

"Does your mother know you are here?"

"No." Steve was less the man and more the boy as he spoke. His eyes dropped momentarily and a slight flush rose to his temples. "Wouldn't it be better if we didn't talk about her?"

"Yes, it might be. But I'm afraid we have to. Do you know how long it is since I have seen your mother?"

"Five years, isn't it?"

"That's right, five years. And it is just five years ago that I let you work in a tunnel. Your mother and I had our first quarrel when you came home bragging about being a sandhog. Oh, we'd had little spats now and then but that was the first one that amounted to anything. She told me it was the cruelest thing I had ever done. I laughed. I said you were born to be a tunnel man."

He jammed one calloused finger into the pipe bowl and tamped the tobacco. Slowly he wiped the ash from his finger against his grimy trouser leg. "Things didn't seem to go right for us after that. I came East to work on a job and she stayed in Detroit. I wrote but I only got one answer—she said I'd stolen her son."

The silence between the two men was agelong. Steve slid the empty coffee cup from hand to hand. He drew his finger across the wet table top and studied the mark that it left. Twice he seemed about to speak but did not. His father's pipe made blue clouds above their heads. The noisy confusion of the crowded restaurant swept round them unnoticed. At length Steve lifted his eyes.

"And that is the reason you and mother are . . .?"

"That's it," said Joe. The words were short, clipped, harsh. "That's why I sent you to college. That's why I wanted you to stay there. But—" and he smiled—"it didn't work, did it, kid? By the way, who gave you the job?"

"Big Tim Martin. He's taking me in with the gang on the next shift."

Joe Redman pushed back his chair. He crossed the room and stood for a moment behind a broad-shouldered giant at one of the tables. Big Tim looked up from his cards and cupped a hand to his ear. A wide grin creased his features and he nodded in vigorous approval. Joe left the table and returned to his son.

"That's settled," he grunted.

"You didn't tell him to lay me off?" Anxiety was in Steve's voice.

"No. What good would that do? You would only go down with one of the other gangs. I just told him I was going to work the center pocket for him, that's all."

"In other words," said Steve, "you don't trust me alone in the heading."

"No-o-o—it's not exactly that, Steve. I guess you'll make a fairly good miner. But the way you acted today—that's not so good."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, yesterday you got my letter. I told you we were pretty well under the river. That was a mistake. I shouldn't have mentioned the tunnel. But I did, and here you are signed up with a gang the next day. That's snap judgment, son. That stuff kills men under the river if they guess wrong."

Resentment flared into Steve's eyes. A swift answer sprang to his lips. The

hair-trigger temper of a Redman leaped up. But a full-throated bellow from Big Tim interrupted.

"Let's go!"

The cry rang loud above the confusion of the room. The towering heading boss arose and started toward the door. The men of his gang dropped their cards or hastily finished a hand.

"Let's go!"

The sandhogs fastened the heavy coat collars tightly about their throats. The men streamed through the door and headed for the shaft.

At the top of the shaft a stout wooden gantry straddled the width of the street. The gang climbed the long flight of stairs to the upper deck. In the center of the platform fast-moving cages brought wet sand from the river bed in small iron muck-cars. Men wheeled flat-cars carrying curved iron segments onto the empty cages and they were lowered swiftly.

Joe Redman and his son crowded with the men of Big Tim's gang onto an empty cage.

"Cut the rope!" The command came from the heading boss and the elevator dropped rapidly down the narrow shaft. A moist cold rose from the sump beneath as the light of day gave place to flaring electric bulbs. The sandhogs huddled closely together for warmth. The wet steel sides of the caisson flashed past as the car fell. There was a slight jar. The men stepped from the cage and walked to the concrete bulkhead blocking the mouth of the tunnel.

THE ENDS of three massive iron cylinders projected from the bulkhead. Bolt studded iron doors were set in the center of each. To the left was the muck-lock through which the sand was carted from the tunnel. Beside it was the man-lock. Above, as close to the roof of the tunnel as it could be squeezed was the emergency lock—the last refuge of the sandhogs in the event of a blow. Should the river break through and flood the heading they were offered one avenue of escape—the emergency lock.

Big Tim stepped to the door of the man-lock. He picked up a bolt and knocked against the iron flange. A deafening roar of escaping air blasted into the shaft. The roar mounted to a shrill scream—then faded to a low wail.

The door groaned with the releasing pressure and swung open. Into the long iron cylinder stepped the gang. Joe stood to one side as Steve ducked his head beneath the low portal. He laid a casual hand upon the boy's back and followed him into the lock. Crouching, the others crowded in and seated themselves on the wooden benches along the sides. Big Tim put his shoulder to the door. It closed with a muffled boom as the rubber gasket flushed with the diaphragm.

"All set?" He glanced along the two lines of waiting men. "Open it up!"

At the far end of the lock was a recording gauge. Before it sat the lock-tender. He reached to the valve above his head and jerked it open. The air screamed into the lock. The rapid compression generated a stifling heat; it burned with the breath of a blast furnace. The pointer on the gauge rose rapidly—five pounds—ten pounds—fifteen—twenty—

"How's the ears?" yelled Joe above the strident howling of the air.

Steve nodded assurance. He held his nose and forced the air into the upper passages of his head to equalize the pressure. Beside him on the long benches the sandhogs were gaping and blowing. The heat increased. Steadily the finger of the gauge rose. The scream of the air beat against their eardrums. Joe smiled and winked at the boy. Steve grinned. Slowly the blast lessened. It stopped. The inner door of the lock moaned. There was a dull swish as the gasket released and the massive portal swung inward. The gauge showed forty pounds.

As the sandhogs stepped from the lock, the length of the tunnel stretched before them in misty darkness. The

lights twinkled dully through the ever-present haze.

"Glad to get back, kid?" asked Joe. They walked slowly down the slight incline toward the heading. Narrow gauge tracks divided the wooden flooring of the tunnel. Steve placed one hand on his father's shoulder to balance himself as he walked one of the rails.

"It's great, dad. There's something about the tunnel—the high air—the—oh, I don't know what it is. I used to think of all this while I was at school. Finally I couldn't stick it any longer. I had to come back."

"You're welcome to it," growled Joe. "I hope I never see the inside of another tunnel. Sometimes I think I won't."

"Go on—don't make me laugh," smiled Steve. "As long as they build these things you'll be down here eating high air."

"Maybe, but I doubt it." Gradually he slowed until they were a few yards behind the gang. "Say, kid, when did you hear from your mother?"

"Last week, I think."

"Does she ever mention me?"

"Sure, lots of times."

"She does?" The veiled eagerness in Joe's voice was lost to his son. "What does she say?"

"Oh, all kinds of things. Wants to know how you are and all that. She asked me if you still get the bends in your arm every week or so."

"Yeah? Well when you write her again, tell her—"

But Joe was left alone. As they neared the heading Steve had raced ahead to greet the men they were relieving. A flicker of pain, maybe of weariness, crossed the father's face as he followed his son.

The work in the tunnel was constant. One gang stepped in and took the tools from the hands of the men working in the heading. Hour upon hour, shift after shift the ceaseless, constant war with the river went on. The muckers in Big Tim's gang seized the shovels while the handles were still warm and tore into the muck pile. The iron-gang clambered up the sides of the tube and finished the half-tightened bolts left by the men going out. There were a few words, a laugh, and thirty tired sandhogs straggled up the tunnel while Big Tim's men took over.

Here in the heading beneath the river was a mad world. The sandhogs, stripped to the waist, drenched with sweat, labored like fiends in the scorching heat. The roar of the air thundering in through the feed lines provided an ever present bass against which the clang of the tools rang in counterpoint. The tunnel was a vapory hell in which steaming demons crouched. The ever changing pressure caused a fog that cast an opalescent veil about the gleaming lights. Figures became dim and hazy, then sprang into bold relief, only to fade again. The completed section of the tube stretched off into ghostly distance out of which roared the strings of muck cars. Weird gurglings arose from the bottom where streams of water oozed in against the pressure.

On a wooden platform suspended across the center of the tunnel worked the iron gang. Monstrous negroes from Senegal and Jamaica swung their ponderous wrenches up and down in rhythmic motion as they tightened the curved iron plates. Through the vague, misty light of the heading, their bobbing figures weaved and swayed. Their black glistening bodies were naked to the waist, powerful, savage, primordial —warriors strayed far from their jungle element.

Below, on the tunnel floor labored the muckers, the infantry of the sandhogs. Their flying shovels heaped the greedy muck-cars high with spoil of the river bed.

At the forward end of the tunnel stood the shield. This huge steel cylinder fitted closely over the advancing section of the tube. It was braced vertically and horizontally. The single crossmember bisecting the shield formed a work-

ing platform. The upright webbing divided the upper and lower sections into pockets, of which there were six.

AROUND the rear circumference were eighteen hydraulic jacks. These pistons thrust against the last ring of segments of the completed tunnel lining. When pressure was applied they forced the shield ahead into the river bed.

Joe Redman and his son climbed the flanges of the iron and crawled into the upper center pocket. With them came Frank Webber, the third miner of the gang. Their helpers busied themselves gathering together the tools and bags of hay. Little was said as the miners advanced to the firing step of the tunnel. Here the threat of the river was greatest.

Before them the face of the tunnel trembled in a delicate balance. A wall of air billowed against the carefully placed boards that braced the heading. Outside, the river strove with its millions of tons of fluid death to pass the invisible barrier and flood the tunnel. Inside, beneath the sloping steel hood of the shield the miners stepped to the attack.

The quarters were cramped, the working platforms were but four feet wide. Steve crawled beneath a projecting brace and studied the face in the right pocket. To the left, Frank Webber, an old timer from the mines of England, critically shifted a face-board. In the center pocket Joe Redman stripped the khaki shirt from his shoulders and tightened his belt. He reached out a calloused hand and lifted a pinch of sand. Slowly he sifted it between his fingers. Bewilderment crowded the wrinkles tightly around his eyes. Again he dipped into the wet muck with his fingers and tested the feel of the sand.

"Y'know, I don't like the looks of this stuff." An uncertainty in the words stopped the labors of the others. "It's changed a lot since yesterday."

"What's bothering you, dad?" asked Steve.

"I'm not sure, kid. This stuff doesn't feel right. We've had good ground all the way across the river but it looks as though we've run into a glacial deposit."

"Gor-blime," laughed Webber. " 'E's started already. I might 'ave knowed. No sooner does young Steve put 'is foot inside the 'eadin' than Joe starts fussin'. The face is all right Joe, it's you that's balmy."

"Maybe," said Joe. "But I've worked under this river before. I'm pretty sure we hit a stretch of gravel along about here on the last job. I wouldn't want to run into a wall of marbles with too many boards out of the face."

"Oh, don't be a crêpehanger," laughed Steve. "This face is fine. Look at it—it cuts like cheese."

He sliced a scoopful of muck from the wall before him. Streams of gray, fine-grained sand slithered in the wake of his shovel and cascaded into tiny mounds at his feet. An eerie whistling grew to a moan as the compressed air in the heading forced its way through the gap. Again the shovel cut deeply. The moan grew to a wail.

"Careful there," Joe said sharply. "You've got a river over your head and it would like to come in."

Steve laughed. His father was of the old school. Caution—care—precision—they were things for old men to worry about. Speed—that was the order of the day. Drive ahead, make tunnel, keep the shield moving—this was the way of the young sandhog.

The corded muscles of his back leaped beneath the sweat-drenched skin as he slashed at the wall. He swept the sand down past the working platform into the bottom where it piled about the legs of the muckers. Half turning, he grabbed a plank from the outstretched arms of his helper and fitted it against the face. Bracing it with his knee, he packed the edges with hay and reached for the screw-jack. This he swung into place and twisted the handles until a warning crack came from the plank.

"This face is all right, dad," he said.

"We won't have any trouble with it."

He drove at his work. The moan of the air sang a wild tune in his ears. The surge of the pressure sent the blood pounding through his veins. This was his trade, a man's trade: fighting the river; driving a tunnel beneath the threatening flood; pitting his skill and his strength against the elements.

"Take it easy, young fellow," cautioned Joe. "That's a shovel you have there, not a broom. Get a few boards in the face before you take out any more sand."

"It'll hold," said Steve. "If I stop to put a board in now I'll lose time."

"Lose time—you'll lose your damn fool life if you don't," cried Joe. "Get some boards in there and pack them with hay, I tell you!"

"I say, Joe," called Webber from the far pocket, "stop blaggardin' the boy. 'E's a right fine miner."

"That's right, Frank," shouted Steve. "You tell him. He seems to think I'm still a kid."

He turned and with a swooping slice sheered clear to the edge of the hood. The air whined angrily through the exposed face. From the lower section of the pocket a low moan sounded like the cry of a beast in pain.

"You young fool!" cried Joe. "Have you no ears? Listen! Even the air is trying to tell you. Get some planks in there and close up that face. Damn the day I ever brought you into a tunnel."

Steve grinned. "Better get some work done in your own pocket or I'll have to come in and help you."

"Why—you—you young pup!" Joe lifted his shovel above his head as though to strike. A blazing flash of rage shook him. Slowly he lowered the shovel.

From the other pocket his son studied him. The grin faded a little.

"Nice temper you've got," he said. "I used to wonder what it was that kept you and mother apart. I think I can guess."

He bent to his work with renewed savagery. His shovel bit deep.

A tiny stream of sand ran from the cut. It slithered down onto the working platform. Quickly it grew. It poured in ever increasing volume. Only then, Steve realized his mistake. He reached for a plank and jammed it upright against the flow.

"Dad!" he yelled. "It's sliding—it's going!"

A section of the face melted away like frost beneath a blow torch. The wail of the air rose, mad, strident. A myriad screaming fiends were unleashed in the heading.

STRIPPED of its friendly mask of sand, the true nature of the face stood forth. Small round stones, rubbed smooth by the relentless surge of ancient ice packs, poured from the open face. They rained down about Steve's legs. The air clouded with a sudden mist. Rapid decompression was drenching the tunnel with fog.

"What have you done?" screamed Joe. "I told you—my God, I told you—it's a blow—"

A blow! The constant dread of the tunnel man. When the surging air explodes upward through the broken face and bursts in a frothing geyser on the surface—when the sodden muck of the river bed pours into the heading—when the river, no longer held in check by the wall of air, rushes in to drown the sandhogs—that is a blow.

From the far pocket Webber took up the cry. "A blow! A blow!" It spread along the tunnel to the toiling sandhogs with lightning rapidity. "A blow! The face is gone!" Muckers dropped their shovels and plunged in headlong flight toward the bulkhead. The iron men cast aside their wrenches and joined in the mad panic. "A blow! A blow!" The cry echoed along the dank walls of the tunnel and sent men rushing for the locks. The air roared down the tube with a sudden violence. A blinding fog

enveloped the heading. The lights dimmed. Terror struck at the struggling workers.

In the face, ahead of the shield stood the miners. Theirs was the fault and theirs the responsibility. Upon their shoulders rested the fate of the gang. If they stopped the mad rush of air even for a moment, lives would be saved. Others might race to the protection of the locks. They must stand and fight the blow to the last.

With a heaving lurch Joe leaped into the pocket beside his son. Tearing a plank from the hands of Webber, who had crossed to help him, he thrust it into the wound. There was a sudden sound of splintering wood and the plank shriveled and was sucked into the gaping hole. Into the growing vacuum Steve flung his shovel, a pick, more planks, bags of hay, everything he could grab. Webber thrashed about the pocket passing tools and boards to the battling pair.

Steadily the sand and gravel poured from the face. The opening grew—a whirlpool of muck into which was drawn everything within reach. The men worked like fiends, pouring the offerings of boards and hay into the consuming maw of the blow. The air shrilled in a wild scream.

"Get out kid—get out—we can't stop it." The words came in gasps from the laboring father. "Run—run I tell you—"

Webber cast one despairing glance at the broken, twisted face and scrambled through the pocket. He jumped from the center platform and splashed into the rapidly rising water. A cry of fear burst from his throat as the chill water swirled about his waist. Thrashing about in the white gloom he blindly fought his way up tunnel.

"Steve—" the cry was wrenched from Joe's contorted lips as he forced a plank into the breach, "Steve, son—get out—go, I say—I can't hold it any longer."

"I—I—can't!" cried Steve.

Standing beside his father in the cramped confines of the narrow pocket the boy was trapped. All unconsciously the older man had constantly shifted his feet as he strove to check the blow. As the muck piled in he had fought his way up and up, keeping his legs free. Bewilderment, fright, the awful newness of a blow had held Steve to one place. Now the muck was piled high about his hips. He heaved backward, dragging at his legs. The muck held fast. He tore at the clinging pile fighting to free himself. It was useless. He was trapped.

"I'm licked, dad!" he screamed. "Get out—you go—"

The shrieking blast of the escaping air drowned out his words. Fog blinded him. He leaned against a brace. Beside him his father loomed a dark mass in the billowing mist. Out of the mad inferno came his voice.

"A plank, kid. Hand me a plank—one chance—it's jamming—"

The whirling mass had clogged. Some slight obstruction in the river bed had caused a momentary stoppage of the blow. It must be blocked, crammed tightly with bags of hay and planks before the driving air blasted a way through. One plank, a single bag, anything would serve. Steve thrust blindly with his hands. He strained to the utmost limit of his reach. Nothing but muck met his hands.

"A plank—ah, Christ—a plank!" The despairing cry sounded like the call of doom. Seconds were precious. Time was life itself. A haggard face loomed suddenly beside him. Horrid realization shone from his father's eyes. The pockets were bare. Not a bag nor a plank remained.

The wail of the air was rising. The shrill cry of the tempest as it spun into the gap rose higher and higher. Now—now was the time to block it. A moment hence—thirty seconds—and it would be too late. The hole would widen and the scant air remaining in the tunnel would burst through. With the restraining pressure gone the river would pour a deluge into the heading.

Steve tried to grin. He had worked a man's trade; he wanted to die a man. A hand fell on his shoulder. A straining face was pressed close to his.

"One chance, kid." The words were torn from lips close to his ear. "One chance—tell her I sent her boy home—tell her, if it works."

Steve clutched wildly at his father's naked shoulders as the truth burned into his brain. His hands tore at the perspiration covered arms.

"My God! Don't! Don't—!"

Joe wrenched—hurled himself away. He sprang at the twisting hole in the face. The air caught him—lifted him—smashed him into the breech in a horrible upward leap. The swirling sand packed tightly about him. The wail of the air lessened—it moaned dully—it stopped.

A dead silence filled the heading. The figure upright in the muck stared unmoving at the solid sand. From far off the steady roar of the incoming air told of the increasing pressure. Steve Redman would not die. The tunnel was saved. The blow was stopped.

The river had taken its toll.

Many stories have been written about the tunnel workers and their weird under-river world, but "High Air" is the first to our knowledge by an actual sandhog. Once again ADVENTURE presents an author who combines powerful prose with priceless experience in his chosen fiction field—and announces with pride and enthusiasm another tunnel story with an even greater punch for the next issue. Don't miss Borden Chase's second story "Tunnel Law" in the August issue!

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

WITH an extraordinarily fine novelette, "Guns Up!" in this issue, Theodore Fredenburgh becomes a member of our Writers' Brigade. This, a tale of the American Artillery, is not his first; he is the author of "Soldiers March," a novel published by Harcourt, Brace & Company. According to old custom he rises beside the fireglow to introduce himself to the assembled company.

I am somewhat hesitant about pushing forward at Camp-Fire among those men who brood into the cherry-red heart of the blaze, or weave memories in the blue smoke curling from their pipes. They are the pioneers of a hundred strange trails, the heroes of a hundred battles, whereas I am just a timid little guy, who never shot any rapids, jumped from a free balloon, or dodged a rampaging elephant in thorn bush up to my armpits.

I was born at Boston, Mass., and my most vivid memory of childhood is of a red-headed boy who whaled the daylights out of me six days a week. He spared me his attentions on Sunday, because his father, being pastor of a small local church, kept his young hellion busy with hymns and other holy pursuits.

At fifteen I lied, and became a member of the Ninth Massachusettes Infantry M. V. M. A tour of duty at Salem, Mass., both during and after fire swept that thriving town was, on the whole, an interesting experience.

In 1917 I went to France with an artillery regiment, the 101st, of Massachusetts. Of almost two years spent in France, nearly ten months were passed at the front.

Upon my return, business kept me shuttling across the United States. In 1925 I introduced myself to troublous matters, such as the Florida Boom, and Hurricanes.

Space is too limited to go into all of that, however, let me say that I became rather an artful dodger of miscellaneous tangible, and intangible, missiles. I had the temerity at one point, to undertake a survey of a large island lying off the Florida coast upon which, it was said, typhus was epidemic. The man who knew those waters like the palm of his hand, or some other portion of his anatomy, lost himself at sea, and with hurricane warnings coming through the radio, a pleasant time was had by all in our cockleshell. Incidentally, I found the islanders suffering from chronic bootleggeritis, and other minor complaints.

I have knocked around some part of the world in tramp ships; and was quite flattered when some Mussolinian police ran me into the calaboose as a suspicious character.

I wanted to locate some tough mugs, among the crags of Corsica, who were said to be bad bandits. Alas, they turned out to be nice boys just trying to get along without the benefit of official regulation.

I found the Mediterranean and Black Seas ports piquant, and I dropped my contribution to the nimble fingers of Marseille's Ditch.

One day I shall go to China. The place is alive with Red Beards, White Wolves, and heaven knows what other hirsute and carniverous cut-throats, not to mention their fishy brothers, the pirates of the coast.

—THEODORE FREDENBURGH.

A FEW words more about "Guns Up!" and its author are not amiss. I did not meet Theodore Fredenburgh until after the acceptance of his first story—it came in cold, without benefit of introduction or acquaintance, and won immediate approval sheerly on its merits. Fredenburgh is a big hearty chap whose talk is vivid and whose ready humor is contagious—and whose mere presence in the office causes a temporary suspension of all solemn editorial activity.

Discussing the combat situation in the climax of "Guns Up!" Ted Fredenburgh had this to say—out of close observation and experience:

The use of light field guns for pointblank work, while not a common parctice, was not, on the other hand, unusual.

I could cite several instances of this type of operation. I'll confine myself to one which during the Chateau Thierry offensive was carried out by officers and men of Battery B, 101st F. A.

A strong German machine-gun rear-guard defense protected the rear of the German forces then retreating from the famous Rheims salient.

At this crucial point, delay on the part of a section of the attacking line of infantry meant either: fatal delay of the advance for a considerable distance on either side; or flanks perilously in the air, with the danger of a strong enemy counter attack turning the exposed flanks and executing terrible defeat and slaughter.

At this point it was decided that under cover of darkness one seventy-five millimeter gun was to be moved, by hand, to a point some distance in advance of the American infantry positions and very close to a machine-gun strong-point which had already been spotted as the seat of the trouble.

The gun crew involved moved their piece at night over open and rough country with only the God of Chance for protection, and successfully placed their gun in position to fire when dawn brought enough light for them to spot their target.

For the remainder of the night they crouched behind the shield of the gun while shell fire swept the area between the opposing lines.

As the first dawn light came this grim little band was fully prepared to check out with their boots on.

At last through the slowly brightening shades of morning they spotted their target. A solitary machine-gun opened on their single cannon standing exposed and alone.

The 75 piece went into action.

The engagement was short and to the point. The single machine gun ceased fire almost at once.

Infantry scouts who had been waiting pushed forward, skirting the isolated band which had risked extinction to open the way.

The way was clear.

I do not think the officer and gun-crew were ever decorated for this action—they may have been cited in orders.

ANOTHER new member of the Writers' Brigade introduces himself at the Camp-Fire. And the editor, with a pardonable pride in the tradition of a quarter century, sits back to listen to an Adventure writer who talks whereof he knows, with authority. The author of a story with a most unusual and dramatic punch, "High Air," in this issue, rises to face the circle.

It seems to be my turn to speak a few words at the Camp-Fire. And as I rise, I can hear some of the old-timers say, "Just who is this recruit in the Writers' Brigade? So he wants to tell us about river tunnels, eh? What does he know about compressed air or sand hogs?"

Well—I am a sand hog, and have been for the past ten years or more.

Then comes the inevitable question, "How did you come to get into that line?"

That takes a bit of explaining.

Back in 1917 a very determined young man decided to see what was going on in France. After a half dozen recruiting officers had advised him to "go home and grow up" he wiggled into the Navy by presenting an affidavit that added a few years to his age. Two months later he made his first trip across as one of the crew on a transport. Nine more trips followed and the determined young man became a fairly good gunner's mate and, as he thought, a very good boxer.

After the war, college didn't seem very interesting—nor did a job in an insurance office. There appeared to be only one course left. The determined young man decided to become the world's lightweight champion. It took all of six fights to change his mind—yes, he won two of them.

By this time Prohibition had arrived so he put his Navy training to good use and joined the "off-shore fleet." That was all right for a time but supplying the thirsty got monotonous. Then out of a clear sky he met a pal of his who was helping the City of New York dig a tunnel under the East River.

The young man thought he might as well have a look at that. He looked, and a week later was swinging a shovel in the "air." Other tunnels followed—Detroit, South America, Belgium, and then back to dig a few for the New York Municipal Subway.

"Ahaaa," says another old-timer, "you *used* to be a sand hog!"

The answer is, "No, sir—I *am*. As a matter of fact, the States of New York and New Jersey have borrowed a few dollars from Uncle Sam with which to build another vehicular tunnel beneath the Hudson River, and within a very few weeks I will be back in the "air" again. Then, if I may, I will say a word or two about the job—sort of let you know how things are going, under the river.

—BORDEN CHASE.

THE following letter presents what may be called the reverse side of the medal—the adventurer by force of dire circumstance rather than choice.

Africa shelters many broken men—odd characters whose names have vanished from the navy and army lists, who have dropped titles and friends and vanished into the blue. of the dark continent. They cover their

You meet these wanderers in every corner

tracks well, though, and it would be an inquisitive fellow who would dare to ask them to speak of the past. But their voices and their manner give them the indelible stamp of breeding.

Somewhere in the Belgian Congo, along a river where canoes still carry more cargo than the steamers, I met one such exile. He was a trader, exchanging blankets, cooking pots and bright tin clocks for palm oil. The natives called him Bwana, and indeed he was their lord and master, ruling with a fair and kindly hand.

In his hot, thatched hut there was a picture, torn from a London society weekly, of a group of people in front of a rambling country house, one of those beautiful mansions where the ivy clambers up to the eaves. In a silver frame was a photograph of a woman. But I had been warned that he discouraged questions.

He had named each lane and clearing on his trading station after a famous London landmark. Here, where the brown river water lapped at the rotten stakes of a jetty, with a crocodile on a mudbank a hundred yards away, was a signboard, "Thames Embankment." There, under the glare of the tropical sun, was a palm lined Regent Street. His store, heavy with the acrid odor of black humanity, was the Albert Hall.

For five years these pitiful signs had been his only reminders of home. Most men are glad to leave such a climate after a year or two; but he had remained. The steamer in which I traveled brought case of whisky, but never a letter with a British stamp.

Along the river they said—for there is gossip even in remote Africa—that a girl once crossed the border from Northern Rhodesia in search of this man, only to turn back when some one told her how she would find him. And I remembered how, when he had taken me into his hut, a native woman had stepped silently out of the back door.

So there he is, a white man swallowed up in a black country.

Another pathetic figure I recall vividly had once been a regular officer in a fine regiment. When I met him he was dressed in faded khaki drill shirt and trousers, and he was in charge of a huge gang of raw natives on the way to a great copper mine in Central Africa.

Black mine laborers are always provided with free clothing, and these muscular negroes had been fitted out with Australian uniform tunics, relics of the war sold cheaply to the mine owners.

My friend the major—such a commanding character with bristling mustache and eyeglass could hardly have been less—had disciplined his queer force into the precision of a line regiment. They numbered off, formed fours, and marched away into the jungle with arms swinging, every man in step. Yet this old officer, who had made the wilds of Africa his parade ground, knew hardly a word of the many native languages in that territory. It was a triumph of personality, making me wonder what sort of breach of etiquette, or social disaster, had brought him into this grim land.

There are scores of these lonely souls in the tropical backwaters of Africa. Some may have lost caste; most of them are heavy drinkers. But I have never met one who had lost that pride which makes them silent when you mention England, the country of their dreams, which so few of them will ever see again.

—LAURENCE G. GREEN.

THE author of "Hell Ship" in this issue has a word to say about the old-fashioned hell ship as a maritime institution.

As to "Hell Ship"—that is a bubble snatched from the wash of a thousand ships. The real Gowans and Oelstroms of the seven seas may be marked by other, or less definite, stripes. Their romantic day is said generally to have passed with the dear dead period when blue-nose mates swaggering in the waist, and quarter-deck bullies ruffling it aft, thought salt horse, weevils and sour hash too good for the sailorman laboring aloft and below, in fair weather and foul, until the sea, rheumatism, or Potters Field claimed them.

500 B. C. or 1900 A. D., sail or steam, afloat or ashore, human nature changes—but little.

—DONALD MACKENZIE.

A COMRADE is curious about an old and never explained natural phenomenon. Is anyone around the Camp-Fire acquainted with the facts behind this mystery?

Somers, N. Y.

When I went first to Florida, in March 1880, there was desultory talk now and then of the "Great Florida Mystery." The local papers, occasionally, had some allusion to it. No one knew what it was, but it was surmised that it must be something in the nature of a volcano or a burning pitch lake. It is curious that so striking a phenomenon as this should not have been definitely investigated, perhaps by the Government.

Col. Norton died some years ago. I well remember him around the University Club; a very quiet pleasant little man, usually in the library. For a number of years he was editor of *Outing*. At a dinner one night my father heard from Col. Norton the account of his own personal attempt to solve the "Great Florida Mystery." His expedition consisted of himself, a Florida cracker, a spring wagon and a mule. They started from a point near the east coast south of Tallahassee and traveled across country by compass, aiming as well as they could for

the spot where the appearances in the sky indicated the location of the "Mystery." The country in this part of Florida is pine land; tall rather scattered trees, with practically no undergrowth. Col. Norton was in the habit of climbing a tree at intervals to take his bearings by the fire or the smoke, using telegraph lineman's spurs for this purpose. One day, a week or more out from civilization he had climbed a tree to take his bearings. This tree was unusual, in that some 30 feet from the ground the trunk inclined sideways for a distance of 10 or 15 feet, then went upwards again. He selected this tree because it was much the tallest in the vicinity. On descending the tree when he came to the slanting part he let himself slide without the use of the irons down the upper side of the incline. He lost control of his progress, slipping around the tree until he fell from it, alighting squarely on his feet, 40 feet below.

A very severe spinal injury was the result of this fall. Anticipating years of invalidism and being a burden upon his wife and daughter, Col. Norton tried to take his own life with his revolver but was prevented by his companion. He was carted back to civilization, brought home and was months in recovering. He regained a fair degree of health but stated that his stature had been reduced by about two inches, the spine having telescoped in some way, in his opinion. This ended his attempts to investigate the "Mystery."

My father was very much interested in the matter, and on his next visit to Washington, not long afterwards, he communicated with an employee in one of the Government departments who, Col. Norton told him, had endeavored himself some years before to investigate the matter. This man told the full story of his attempt to my father.

He had approached the place from the west coast, ascending one of the streams which led in the general direction desired as far as it was navigable and then trying to cut his way through the brush. The country was inundated to a depth of about one foot and they had to chop a path through the bush practically the whole distance. Two hundred feet progress was as much as they made on some days. At night they had to sleep in hammocks as the country was under water. Not being a man of means he had not been able to outfit his expedition sufficiently and lack of funds necessitated its abandonment.

Dr. Gamble of Tallahassee, Florida, was the last source of information in this connection. I made his acquaintance at Wainscott, Long Island. Knowing that he was from Florida, I one day brought up this topic of the "Great Florida Mystery," and learned some more. It seems that his father's house stood on the outskirts of Tallahassee, on comparatively high ground, and he said that there was unquestionably something to the southwest entirely unexplainable. In the daytime there was frequently a heavy cloud of smoke to be seen in that direction, 30 or 40 miles distant, when weather conditions permitted, and at night when the clouds were of such formation as to favor it, a glow, the reflection of something burning was frequently visible. He took bearings on the spot, marking the trees on their lawn, and told me that the direction of the phenomenon was always the same. This precaution was very necessary because, especially in those days, forest fires were a nightly occurence in Florida. He stated that sometimes after a very heavy general rain there would be a diminution or disappearance of the phenomenon, then it would come back again.

This is the story as I know it. I am very curious to know what some reader of Camp Fire may have to say about it.

—WILLIAM C. WOOD.

BACK in the April issue I offered a few small prizes to the members of the Civilian Conservation Corps who would write the most pertinent and interesting letters about their experience in the corps. My interest was one of curiosity—of deeply interested curiosity. The response was gratifying and more than a little impressive. I am glad to publish the following list of men to whom are awarded—with considerable headache over comparative merit—the prizes announced.

For an absorbing letter that is a dramatic short story in itself, a check for $25 has gone to Earle Bickerton, 636th Company, U. S. C. C. C., Camp Whitnall Park, Hales Corners, Wisconsin.

A check for $15 went to Grainville B. Simmons, 1738th Company, U. S. C. C. C., Pelsor, Arkansas. Another for $10 to Samuel Livingston, 1916th Company, U. S. C. C. C., Camp Avenales, Arroyo Grande, California.

And these dozen subscriptions to *Adventure* go gladly to the following writers of excellent letters, with all our hopes here of real enjoyment in the many issues to come:

Ralph Wilson, 677 Co. C.C.C., Camp Wolf Lake, Baldwin, Mich.

Frank O'Connell, 1785 Co., V.C.C.C., Grand Marais, Minn.

Wm. L. Evans, 1419 Co., C.C.C., Camp P5, Carrabelle, Fla.

Ned H. Shmerl, 1672 Co., Elmhurst, Ill.

Maurice A. Pearson, Co. 299 C.C.C., Manassas, Va.

Chas. I. Siner, 340 Co., Half Way House Camp, Mifflinburg, Pa.

Thomas Johnson, 283 Co., C.C.C., T.V.A. 5, Nitrate, Ala.
Alfred B. Lane, 1257 Co., C.C.C., T.V.A. 24, Tazewell, Tenn.
James E Ritchie, 1399 Co., V.C.C.C., Camp 94, Edgemere, Pa.
Robt. Eulberg, 602 Co., C.C.C., Cougar, Wash.
Paul E. Behe, 381 Co., C.C.C., Wells Tannery, Pa.
James S. Dace, 1783 Co., C.C.C., Pelso, Ark.

I HAD an idea in the very beginning that when I solicited letters from the boys in the C. C. C. camps I was inviting a job upon myself. I wasn't wrong. It's been a job, and a tough one. Tough simply because I could never do it justice. It was too big.

The letters came. They came in bunches, not only from the boys themselves, but from friends, critics, patrons and cranks. They whooped it up enthusiastically; or they raised blue murder. I tried at first to render calm replies, but the matter got beyond me. I eliminated all those with an axe to grind —excepting the particular axe in which I was interested—and tried to keep pace with the really good letters. And that got beyond me.

This must serve for reply to many excellent and interesting letters which it has been my good fortune to have received. If I cannot return a personal acknowledgment, I do submit here with sincerity and real good faith my strong personal thanks.

The personal and particular axe I had to grind was the welfare of the young men of this country, and no argument has shaken my interest in them. In fact, the interest is more than personal—far more. It is the interest of this magazine, and the obligation of its editor. This is a man's magazine. It is built and written and read by men. There are magazines for every shade of political opinion and every visionary cause. *Adventure's* only cause is the comradeship and fellowship of men—comfort in peril, sustenance in need, the ready laugh and the helping hand, and the vigilance of man for his neighbor's moment of despair.

I have seen despair lifted from courageous men by a mere word and a grip of a tense shoulder. There is more now; there are tremendous forces moving, pushing, driving. The unfathomable end is not in sight, but at least we are going somewhere. Inaction is ended.

You will perhaps remember that deathless line: "It isn't life that matters; it's the courage you bring to it!"

I think right there is my personal axe. And I intend to grind it.

HERE is a bit of shop talk that will be hailed, I am certain, with satisfaction by all of you. The publishers authorize me to announce now that your magazine will return to twice-a-month publication with the September issues.

Adventure has appeared on the newsstands through the years at intervals while have varied with circumstance and changing policy. It is the firm intention of the publishers and this editorial office to adopt further changes in policy only in one direction: that which aims at the flourishing *Adventure* we all once knew, the finest man's magazine ever published. Neither cost nor pain nor effort will deflect the course.

It is not possible to effect all the desired improvements overnight. Good stories are not merchandise to be ordered from a warehouse; they must be sought out and planned and considered with care. That is the function of any up-and-going editorial shop; and that is what has us all working extra hard these days. The results will be evident in a very little while.

I have been simply unable to reply to all the queries regarding our plans for *Adventure's* future. Let this serve for reassurance. If there be fears, let them be allayed.

Adventure is on the right track, upgrade and going fast.

—W. C.

ASK ADVENTURE

For free information and services
you can't get elsewhere

In what far corner of the globe lies your dream of adventure? Do you plan to sail some day for the South Seas, to venture into the interior of Morocco, to explore the dark Orinoco, or roam the cities of the China coast? Wherever your dream lies, an Ask-Adventure expert has been there before you; he has lived on the country, has survived peril and disease and danger by his wits and his intelligence. He can give you the low-down on costs, customs, living conditions and risks as no learned research scholar can anywhere.

FROM spear and cutlass to walking stick! Alas, my gallants!

Request:—Could you please give me some information concerning sword canes? First: origin, if known. Second: types, if more than one. Third: plans or information on how to construct an inexpensive cane—what kind of wood would be best, where obtainable, type of blade, construction of release of outer sheath, and approximate cost of the whole.

—HOMER HOUCHINS, Glen Morgan, W.V.

Reply by Capt. R. E. Gardner:—The sword cane came into being as the habit of sword bearing passed out. By the last quarter of the 18th century the various European states had cleared their roads of highwaymen. Duelling became less fashionable. Therefore it was no longer necessary to wear a weapon. The habit of arms bearing fostered through many generations was not easily cast aside, however. Some substitute was required by the die-hards and the sword cane met their need. They could carry a weapon without offending the dictates of fashionable society.

Sword canes are, generally, of one type and differ only in details as to blade section; straight or crooked grip; operation of release and method of concealing the point of contact of the grip and blade sheath. They have never met with the favor of arms collectors and can be bought relatively cheap, surely much cheaper than they could be constructed as single examples.

The details of construction requested in your letter are beyond me. I can only suggest that you purchase one from a dealer in weapons, say, Francis Bannerman Company, 501 Broadway, New York, N. Y. But don't forget that the sword cane is a "concealed weapon" and can get a man in trouble.

THE blow that works from the ground up and hurts—the boxer's shock punch.

Request:—Can you suggest what I could do to improve my boxing? My height is five feet nine inches; and my weight is 127½ pounds. I am comparatively well-developed muscularly. But I cannot seem to get my punches to hurt and I seem to tell with which hand I am going to hit.

—MURRAY A. BERK, Miami Beach, Fla.

Reply by Capt. Jean V. Grombach:—The best book on boxing is a manual of "Boxing" price $.50, published by A. G. Spalding, 105 Nassau Street, New York, N. Y.

I recommend that you relax as you box and when you hit, instead of pushing or throwing your punches, you hit out, contracting or tensing your muscles at the moment of impact. Let this tension come right from your toes through your thighs to your shoulders to your fist.

The mere fact that you "telegraph" your punches or give away the fact that you are about to hit out with one hand or another, shows that, first, you are stiff or contracted; second, that you are throwing or pushing your punches.

IN THE June Ask-Adventure, Mr. Charles Hall gave his opinion of the origin of the phrase, "Blow the man down." We have had another inquiry on the matter, and Robert Frothingham, the expert on Old Songs, replies—

"Blow the man down" is virtually a seaman's challenge to the elements. The "man," strange as it may seem, is the topsail, on its way up to the masthead, on the halliards of which the sailors are straining with all their might, after having been soaked through by heavy weather. They work stiffly and the job is one that calls for a chantey. The mate comes in with a cheerful salutation, "Someone sing! What in hell do you think this is—a blasted funeral?" Someone, anyone, starts the lilt. It's a sort of thumbing of the nose on the part of the crew to disaster and a devil-may-care attitude toward everything

that is supposed to endanger the ship. Briefly, it carries a significance to an old before-the-mast sailor that can scarcely be expressed. I mean just that. Even an old AB would find it difficult to express its real meaning. My authority for this is none less than my dear old friend Bill Adams, the only salt-water sailor under canvas that is left in the United States. And it puzzled even him to reply to my query. To quote him: "It is easily understandable when one has been a sailor and has taken his part in a chantey, but infinitely less so to one who has not been through that experience."

A LETTER in cipher cries out for solution. Here's a real mystery—can you figure it out?

Request:—The figures below, which appear to be some kind of code or cipher, were found by a friend of mine while examining some valuable old letters and papers. We have attempted to translate it on the basis of repetition, frequency and pure guess work, but have been unable to accomplish anything.

The figures are on what seems to be an ordinary piece of letter paper, without a watermark, written in ink, without spacing between them, as follows:

942293906259174689397998395946
345881905863899324252317537919
637962463489466213872262807539

—T. F. RIDDELL, Champaign, Ill.

Reply by Mr. Francis H. Bent:—I'm afraid I can't be of much assistance to you in regards to your code.

I suggest that you write to:—

Intelligence Section, War Department, Washington, D. C.

Special Agent in Charge, U. S. Bureau of Investigation, 1900 Bankers' Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

The Scientific Crime Detection Laboratory, 469 East Ohio Street, Chicago, Ill.

I'm not suggesting that any of these will solve the code themselves, but they may be able to put you in touch with someone who can.

Let me know how you make out with it.

PENGUINS (or is it pengui?) have lately taken the country by storm. They have the solemn dignity of ambassadors—absurd and irresistible.

Request:—I am making a hobby of collecting pictures and images of penguins. I'd like to know if they are found only in the Antarctic? Are they very extinct? What are their habits? Where could I get pictures of these birds?

—FRED BERMINGHAM, San Pedro, Calif.

Reply by Mr. Davis Quinn:—There are altogether about 20 species of penguins, all occurring in the southern hemisphere, from the Antarctic to Tristran d'Acunha in the Atlantic, Amsterdam Island in the Indian Ocean, along the west coast of South America in the Pacific, off the Cape of Good Hope, along the coast of Australia, south and east of New Zealand, and though these birds are not found north of the equator some species occur to the Galapagos. The Falkland Islands are richest in species if not in number of individuals. Range in size from small species 19 inches high to Emperor penguin 3½ feet high, record weight of one specimen 78 pounds. It might interest you to know that the name is derived from the Latin *pinguis* (fat); some say it comes from the English "pin-wing" (pinioned wing). Penguins breed in the higher southern reaches of their range in great colonies called rookeries; nest composed of twigs, leaves, stones, trash, arranged on the ground or in holes. Usually lay two chalky whitish or greenish-white eggs, males assist in incubation which takes about six weeks. Young are born blind, clothed in down; do not enter water till long after they are born, being fed meantime by the parents who insert their bills in mouths of the young to feed them. The regular diet of penguins consists of fish, crustaceans, cephalopods and other mollusks and some vegetal matter. Notes of the adults are a croak, a scream, a murmuring sound and in the young a whistle. These birds waddle rather clumsily on land, although the Emperor penguin is said to propel itself with some agility by lying horizontally in the snow and using its feet. No birds are such expert divers. In the water penguins move beneath the surface, using the wings as though they were flying, and accomplish considerable speed, moving much faster than such aquatic birds as for example ducks which paddle on the surface with their feet. The penguin uses its feet for steering only. Like whales and other aquatics this bird takes a long breath before diving and while submerged exhales, emitting two pearly strings of small bubbles from its mouth while it swims. Penguins are friendly, curious creatures and manifest an unwarranted confidence in their interest in man, as you may have read in the accounts of Antarctic explorers and seamen. When on the ice their naive reluctance to run from man allows them easily to be clubbed to death. It is this fatal stupidity of the bird that has resulted in great diminution of its numbers till it is today rare and in some cases extinct. The bird is not without intelligence, being more or less easily tamed and even to some extent trained; it is simply that the evolution of this particular bird, like that of many another animal, never anticipated the ignorant destruction that man inflicts needlessly on wild life in every corner of the earth he invades. But the penguin is no coward and will inflict savage bites with his beak when irritated, although this is mild

defense against clubs, knives and bullets.

Penguin pictures and pieces of art you will have to search out yourself. I know of no one handling these articles, except the usual gift shops and art dealers whom I would suggest you dog in hope of occasional stray material. The New York Aquarium, and probably zoological parks and museums throughout the country will sell you photographs of these birds.

IS THERE a tale in anyone's memory of firewood from a Spanish galleon? Or was it a desert mirage?

Request:—Can you give me any information about the legend of the Spanish galleon reported to have been found in the desert sands of the Imperial Valley by early explorers? I have always been interested to learn whether the lost galleon story was just another one of those yarns, or whether it has any authenticity.

Many years ago I read in a book of western travel that the first white man who penetrated the Imperial Valley had come across an old Spansh vessel half buried in the sands. It was of course known even to the pioneers that the Gulf of Lower California had at one time extended into what is now the Imperial Valley, and it was thought that this vessel had sailed up there and sunk, the waters of the Colorado River later bringing down sand to cut off a part of the valley, after which the cut-off part dried up.

Some twenty years ago, while working on newspapers in Imperial, El Centro and Brawley, I made repeated efforts to get some authentic information on this matter. I encountered only one person there who had ever heard of the fabled vessel. He was connected with a government land office, and said that he had heard that such a vessel had been found a half century or so before, but that it was alleged to have been cut up piece by piece for firewood, until nothing remained. I am of the opinion that if this had been the case, the story would have become a famous desert myth, like the Peg-Leg Mine.

—H. S. McCAULEY, Evanston, Ill.

Reply by Mr. Frank Winch:—If there is anything to the yarn of galleon drifting into the sands of the Imperial Valley, I have failed to discover it through the various avenues of research that are open to me.

I have heard the story, like many other stories of the ancient days. I recall reading a short article about it some time ago, and was quite intrigued with the idea, until the solution was presented that the galleon was either the result of a mirage, or as hinted, the result of an effort to finance a treasure hunting expedition for gold that was supposed to have been on board.

The thing in my mind may be put down as one of the famous Spanish prisoner ideas, which is of course no idea at all. If the Salton sea area, was once water, it is possible that water was once over the Imperial Valley area. The remains of Indian settlements through the mountain section are a fact.

A NEW department on marine architecture in Ask-Adventure can tell you what line to which mast and why.

Request:—Though you have not listed ship models under your "Ask-Adventure" service, I feel that some of you can help me.

I have been fascinated by the idea of building ship models but think that a clipper ship, with her square rig, would be beyond me so have begun a Chesapeake pilot schooner. I have the hull pretty well along but do not know whether to try to carve the keel, stem and sternpost out of the block or put them on afterwards. Which shall I do?

The stern also bothers me as the plans are not particularly clear. Is the deck at the same level for the whole length, or is there a break in it?

Would this boat, dating from about 1835, steer with a wheel or a tiller?

—EDGAR F. FRANKLIN, New York, N. Y.

Reply by Mr. Charles H. Hall:—You are wise to start your model shipyard with a fore and after, avoiding the complications of the square rigger. A schooner is much simpler to rig than a ship or even a brig. Rigging is a slow job, and "rattling down" is just a chore.

You will find it much easier and neater to end the hull at the rabbet line, adding keel, stem and sternpost afterwards. It is difficult to make a decent job of it if you try to carve them in one with the hull. Cut them out of a flat piece of the proper thickness, taking care to have the grain of the wood run the right way. Fit the inside to the hull first, leaving enough stock to allow for trimming, and then finish the outside. Fasten to the hull with the smallest size bank pins and a good glue. You may find that your keel is deeper forward than aft. At first sight, this may look like an error in the plans but it was a characteristic of Baltimore craft of the period.

You will find that the stern is odd. The hull proper ends at the transom forward of the sternpost, to which the post is secured, but there was a false transom abaft this well above water, leaving room for the rudder stock. The deck and the upper three or four streaks of planking were carried aft to the false transom. The opening below may look large, but the ships of that time had enormous rudder ports.

The deck almost certainly has a break, from six to ten inches high, just forward of the mainmast, like that in the Gloucester fishing schooners. It was put there to break the force of any sea that boarded her instead

of letting it sweep the whole length of the deck as it would if the deck were flush.

She would doubtless steer with a tiller. It would be about seven feet long with its head about three feet above the deck. Relieving tackles would be used in case she steered too hard in a blow. The rudder head is rounded and extends far enough above the deck to have a mortise to take the tenon in the end of the tiller.

IN A FORMER issue we announced the resignation from Ask-Adventure staff of Captain Dingle and Dr. Neville Whymant. Their departments have been partially filled. And now an expedition calls Capt. R. W. van Raven de Sturler to far-off places out of the reach of inquirers. Another expert, Dr. C. W. Twomey, has been forced to resign. All were valuable members of our staff and have earned all our thanks and good wishes.

Any reader who considers himself well-informed on the following subjects is invited to apply to fill the vacancies. Please state qualifications in your letter.

Asia: Siam, Andamans, Malay Straits, Strait Settlements, Shan States, Yunnan, Java, Sumatra, Dutch East Indies, Kashmir, Nepal, Annam, Southern and Eastern China, Cambodia, Tongking.

Africa: Egypt, Tunis, Algeria, Belgian Congo, British Sudan.

Sea: Atlantic and Indian Oceans, Cape Horn, Magellan Straits, Mediterranean Sea, Islands and Coasts.

Things you never knew till

ADVENTURE TOLD YOU

(This material is compiled entirely from the files of *Ask Adventure*)

GOVERNMENT manufacture of coins is so ancient an institution that any private coinage is now automatically regarded as counterfeit. Yet so recently as 1860, when Colorado was producing a flood of wealth in gold, the private firm of Clark and Gruber, finding no law to stop them, set themselves up in the minting business in Denver and turned out great quantities of pure gold coin which was accepted as legal tender by everyone. The Government, helpless, was forced to call on Congress to pass a bill to forbid the practice, which bill became law in 1862. Clark and Gruber coins are still in existence, and will bring from eager collectors prices up to 30 times their face value.

DESPITE the vengeful fury with which the Government tracked down and reputedly killed John Wilkes Booth, assassin of President Lincoln, a legend persists that Booth escaped and lived for many years after. Stories strongly supported by circumstantial evidence have reported him in various sections of the country under assumed names.

THE civilization of the Maya Indians of Yucatan at its peak, 200 A. D. to 600 A. D., compared with contemporary white civilizations, surpasses them brilliantly in its grasp of astronomy and mathematics. The Mayan priests with the naked eye established laws of the universe which the white man was only to discover with the aid of powerful astronomical telescopes; and the perfect Mayan calendar is many centuries older than our own.

MEN who die in Arctic cold do not normally succumb to low temperatures but to scurvy, disease or starvation. The human body, well nourished, can withstand incredible cold. A surveying party, 200 miles north of Prince Albert, Sask., calmly survived a prolonged blizzard bringing 60° below inland off Hudson's Bay—and further, through the almost inconceivable cold of 78° below zero.

LONG after England abolished by law the nefarious African slave trade, ruthless shipping masters continued to pursue the highly profitable trade, risking severe punishment. It was always possible to drown the cargo and evade penalty, even when this was done in sight of the pursuing government cruiser. The law was so worded that officers had no case unless negroes were actually found in the slaver when boarded. One master who kept a beautiful mulatto in his cabin, took her forth and drowned her though she carried his child. Another linked all his negroes to his anchor chain on deck, waited till the last moment, and then callously let the chain go—dragging 800 souls overside to eternity.

THE ASK ADVENTURE SERVICE is free, provided self-addressed envelope and FULL POSTAGE for reply are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries must enclose International Reply Coupons, which are exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.

Send each question *direct* to the expert in charge of the section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **Do Not** send questions to this magazine. Be definite; explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question. The magazine does not assume any responsibility. **No Reply** will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing or for employment.

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